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Plato and Thucydides on Athenian Imperialism

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Plato and Thucydides on Athenian Imperialism

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To my family

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receive in our sons Isaac and Adam. I never fully appreciated the power and seriousness of the challenge that the love of one's own poses to justice until their births. Finally, I will never be able to repay my parents for the love and support they've given me through my whole life. During the writing of this dissertation, my mother reminded me what courage looks like in deeds. And my father reminded me that even though speech sometimes seems impotent in the face of deeds, it is not. I dedicate this to all of them.

Plato and Thucydides on Athenian Imperialism

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2012

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For over two thousand years, Plato's superiority to Thucydides was taken as an article of faith in Western philosophy. Nietzsche was the first to challenge this verdict by asserting his view—on philosophical grounds—that Thucydides was the more penetrating analyst of the human condition. Other than Nietzsche's consideration of the two thinkers, surprisingly little has been done to investigate the connections between the two greatest Greek prose writers. My purpose in this dissertation is to rekindle this debate in light of new evidence to see what—if anything—can be gained by examining the relationship between how Plato and Thucydides treat the problem of Athenian imperialism. More specifically, I believe and attempt to show that: (1) Plato silently but explicitly directs his readers to different parts of the *History* through the use of textual references and thematic patterns; (2) Plato uses these textual allusions to highlight the common ground between the two thinkers, and that Plato understands Thucydides to be an ally to his philosophic aims; (3) Plato and Thucydides agree that the underlying cause of Athenian imperialism can be attributed to a combination of greed (*pleonexia*) and the internalization of specific sophistic teachings that, whether intended by the sophists or not, support unbridled appetitiveness as the best way of life; and (4) Plato and Thucydides largely agree on the solution to the problem—that *pleonexia* must be extirpated from the ruling order.

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Introduction

For over two thousand years, Plato's superiority to Thucydides was taken as an article of faith in Western philosophy. It is not terribly difficult to understand why this was the case. The majesty of Plato's corpus is nearly impossible to deny.[1] Plato's dialogues are littered with insights about such weighty things as the human soul and its composition, the nature of knowledge and reality, and the relationship between virtue and community. Unlike Thucydides, whose work appears at first blush to focus only on a particular, historically situated event, Plato is the avatar for what it means to be a philosopher. Through his dialogues, Plato weaves a comprehensive and interconnected web of ideas that take in the whole of human life.[2]

Nietzsche was the first to challenge this verdict by asserting his view—on philosophical grounds—that Thucydides was the more penetrating analyst of the human condition. For Nietzsche, Thucydides' analytic superiority is due to his more astute and synoptic presentation of human motivation and his clear-eyed "scientific" method, in contrast to Plato's moralism.[3] Other than Nietzsche's consideration of the two thinkers, surprisingly little has been done to investigate the connections between the two greatest Greek prose writers. As R. B. Rutherford observes, it is "astounding that more has not

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[1] Even Nietzsche testifies to Plato's greatness in the frequency, vehemence, and often outlandishness with which he attacks Plato. Among other things, Nietzsche criticizes Plato's ability as a prose stylist in

[2] It is this comprehensiveness that led Whitehead to make his famous quip that the "safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato." Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 39.

[3] Nietzsche conveniently ignores the moral character of Thucydides' judgments. For example, Thucydides says of the Athenian general Nicias that: "of all the Greeks in my time he was the one who least deserved such a misfortune, since he had regulated his whole life in the cultivation of virtue" (8.86). Translation from: Thucydides, *On Justice, Power, and Human Nature: The Essence of Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993). References to Thucydides are cited by book and chapter number.

been done to examine their [Plato and Thucydides'] relationship."[4] Writing in 2009, Simon Hornblower writes that the relation of Thucydides and "the Socratic corpus, has not been much studied since…the early part of the twentieth century."[5] While it is true that Plato does not mention Thucydides in his works, neither do any other fourth-century writers.[6] And, though we remain uncertain as to both when Thucydides died and when his work was publically available, we do know that it was accepted as sufficiently authoritative for Socrates' second most famous student, Xenophon, to begin his history (*Hellenica*) at 411, the point where Thucydides—in all likelihood involuntarily—breaks off mid-sentence.[7]

The most detailed comparison between Plato and Thucydides was done by Max Pohlenz nearly a century ago.[8] Pohlenz highlights connections between Plato's analysis of democracy in the *Republic* and Pericles' Funeral Oration.[9] Leo Strauss mentions, but does not thoroughly analyze, the similarity between Plato and Thucydides' accounts of early history in Book III of the *Laws* and the beginning chapters of the *History*.[10] However, as many commentators have observed in passing, there are many themes to

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[4] R. B. Rutherford, *The Art of Plato: Ten Essays in Platonic Interpretation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 66.

[5] Simon Hornblower, "Intellectual Affinities," in *Thucydides*, ed. Jeffrey S. Rusten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 63.

[6] This very peculiar fact has yet to be adequately explained.

[7] Thucydides certainly survived the end of the war (2.65), but we have no evidence that requires a date later than this.

[8] Max Pohlenz, *Aus Platos Werdezeit* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1913).

[9] Pohlenz also connects Pericles' address with the *Menexenus*. In the past thirty years, the *Menexenus* is the only work that has generated much research on the relationship between the two thinkers. Stephen G. Salkever, "Socrates' Aspasian Oration: The Play of Philosophy and Politics in Plato's *Menexenus*," *The American Political Science Review* 87, no. 1 (1993). S. Sara Monoson, "Remembering Pericles: The Political and Theoretical Import of Plato's *Menexenus*," *Political Theory* 26, no. 4 (1998).

[10] Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 237. As many have noticed, Thucydides' work bears no official title and Thucydides himself never refers to his work as a history. Even if he did, in Greek the word history (*historia*) means "investigation" or "inquiry." However, I follow standard convention and will refer to his work as the *History*.

which Plato and Thucydides both attend, including: the problem of demagoguery, the puzzle of Alcibiades, the analogy between cities and individuals, the analysis of Athenian imperialism and moral dissolution, the problem of civil strife (*stasis*), and the *ethos* of power politics. Perhaps the reason why so little comparative work has been done is that it is ultimately impossible to prove a relationship between the two thinkers beyond doubt—a problem compounded by the fact that many of the same themes are taken up by other fifth and early fourth-century writers. To take merely one example, the *agon* in Euripides' *Phoenician Women* considers the conflict between moderation and power politics in a manner akin to Plato's *Gorgias*. Taking all this into account, it is not terribly surprising that most commentators have responded negatively to Pohlenz's argument.[11]

My purpose in this dissertation is to rekindle this debate in light of new evidence to see what—if anything—can be gained by carefully examining the relationship between how Plato and Thucydides treat the problem of Athenian imperialism. More specifically, I believe and will attempt to show that: (1) Plato silently but explicitly directs his readers to different parts of the *History* through the use of textual references and thematic patterns; (2) Plato uses these textual allusions to highlight the common ground between the two thinkers and that Plato understands Thucydides to be an ally to his philosophic aims; (3) Plato and Thucydides agree that the underlying cause of Athenian imperialism can be attributed to a combination of greed (*pleonexia*) and the internalization by the Athenians of specific sophistic teachings that, whether intended by the sophists or not, support unbridled appetitiveness as the best way of life; and (4) Plato and Thucydides largely agree on the solution to the problem—that *pleonexia* must be extirpated from the ruling order.

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[11] For the classic statement rejecting Pohlenz's argument see Jacqueline de Romilly, *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism*, trans. Philip Thody (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963), 362-68.

Apart from its interest to students of ancient political philosophy, the topics of imperialism and greed resonate with many of the dilemmas currently facing the world, and the United States in particular. Let us take greed as an example. In the last decade, Americans have seen a conflagration of corporate scandals—Enron, WorldCom, A.I.G., Bernard Madoff, the list goes on—that paint the picture of a corporate class seemingly run amok, ignoring their ethical and legal obligations while at the same time ransacking their own investors. The principal responses to these events have been attempts to put in place better institutional checks and balances to govern corporations.[12] This approach to addressing the problem of greed is entirely consistent with the modern philosophic tradition's general acceptance of selfish motives. Rather than attempt to reform these motives by reforming individual souls, moderns consider the more promising avenue to be structuring rules such that they channel or align people's selfish interests to produce outcomes similar to the ones that would come about if individuals were brimming with virtue.[13] However, empirical evidence suggests that using structural reforms to deal with the problem of greed and prevent future scandals is usually ineffective.[14]

Plato and Thucydides understand greed in a fundamentally different way. For them, greed (*pleonexia*) is a habit of soul characterized by a grasping acquisitiveness or a disproportionate desire to get more. For both thinkers, the most common expression of greed is materialism, or the attempt to satisfy bodily desires through wealth, power or

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[12] For example, the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 designed to more tightly govern securities regulations.
[13] Since the analysis of corporate activity tends to be done by economists, we should not be too surprised by this. And, politically speaking, it is substantially easier to propose regulatory or legal changes than soul craft.
[14] L. Bebchuk and J. Fried, *Pay Without Performance: The Unfulfilled Promise of Executive Compensation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). Q. Cheng and T.D. Warfield, "Equity Incentives and Earnings Management," *Accounting Review* 80, no. 2 (2005). P. M. Healy and K. G. Palepu, "The Fall of Enron," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17, no. 2 (2003). S. Bhagat and B. S. Black, "The Non-Correlation between Board Independence and Long-Term Firm Performance," *Journal of Corporation Law* 27, no. 2 (2002).

other goods. However, Plato and Thucydides recognize that under specific conditions, this kind of ordinary greed can morph from mere materialism into a rapacious desire to get power for its own sake. Their response to our corporate scandals would likely include reforming the souls of businessmen and women such that they internalize the idea that wealth is not the *summum bonum*, but instead that there are other moral principles to which acquisitiveness must be subordinate to. Interestingly, there is some empirical evidence that this approach can be effective.[15] Without belaboring the point, I believe, given America's current position in the world, that Plato and Thucydides have more to say to us right now than perhaps any other two thinkers from the canon of political philosophy, and I will try to show that reading them in relation to each other deepens our understanding of both thinkers. Though I believe they have important things to say about our current circumstances, my chief concern in this dissertation is examining the relationship between the two thinkers. Therefore, while I will not be pausing to directly link Plato and Thucydides' teachings to current political debates, it should be fairly obvious to the reader where and how they might come into play.[16]

Let us begin, then, by investigating commonalities between the two thinkers in method and approach. In thinking about the causes of things, or the nature of motivation, or the nature of justice, or how one should live, we find ourselves in the same predicament Plato describes in the *Meno* (86e) and that Thucydides posits as the problem of history (1.20-23). Namely, we are led to inquire into things whose natures we do not

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[15] D. Moberg, "Role Models and Moral Exemplars: How do Employees Acquire Virtues by Observing Others?," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (2000).

[16] For an outstanding example of how Plato and Thucydides can be used to illuminate current political debates, see Gerald M. Mara, *The Civic Conversations of Thucydides and Plato: Classical Political Philosophy and the Limits of Democracy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008). Mara applies the thought of Plato and Thucydides to: rational choice theory, deliberative democracy, John Rawls and Clifford Geetz' conceptions of shared cultural meaning, and postmodern democratic theory. However, given his project of showing classical political theory's relevance to contemporary debates over democracy, Mara largely ignores the question of the *relationship* between Plato and Thucydides.

yet know, but that nevertheless stand as a goal for our understanding these things. Thucydides and Plato not only recognized this problem, they both attempted to overcome it by writing in such a way that readers are not merely passive recipients of descriptions, propositions, or theories, but themselves participate in fleshing out various political, ethical, metaphysical, and epistemological teachings. While scholars frequently remark on the participatory nature of Plato's dialogues, we would do well to remember what used to be a similar opinion about Thucydides. Plutarch observed that: "Thucydides is always striving for this vividness in his writing, since it is his desire to make the reader a spectator, as it were, and to produce vividly in the minds of those who peruse his narrative the emotions of amazement and consternation which were experienced by those who beheld them."[17]

For both Plato and Thucydides, the "vividness" of their works is not exclusively the result of the dramatic elements or techniques each use. As any reader of the *Laws* is aware, more than a few of Plato's dialogues lack the beautiful staging of the *Protagoras*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and *Phaedo*, or the passionate intensity of the *Gorgias*. Similarly, Thucydides cautions his readers that his abstaining from patriotic storytelling will make listening to him less enjoyable (1.22). I think both authors' "vividness" results from a combination of shrewdly employed dramatic techniques and the frequent use of *antilogy*—the balancing of opposed accounts. Put together, these devices serve to make the reader a strange kind of participant who is encouraged to consider each account from its own perspective (the importance of which is almost always underscored by the dramatic elements in the *History* and the dialogues). Indeed, Socrates frequently cautions his interlocutors that they must continually investigate the matter at hand as well as their

[17] Plutarch, *De Gloria Atheniensium*, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge: Loeb-Harvard University Press, 1936), 3.346-3.47.

previous agreements, lest they succumb to the error of believing to know something that they do not.

In both Plato and Thucydides, then, there are many voices at work, each presenting a perspective that is held up to scrutiny and, when held under that light, is nearly always rendered problematic. Both Thucydides' *History* and Plato's dialogues educate their readers through the tensions created between various elements of each text that generate perplexity or wonder when set alongside one another. For example, in a Platonic dialogue, the tensions that develop in the various accounts of the interlocutors often demonstrate that the merely having a basic formula or definition is insufficient to create understanding. This problem becomes particularly acute when it comes to settling normative questions.[18] Just as the Platonic dialogues encourage their readers to participate in the search for an account alongside the interlocutors, the *History* encourages its readers to make sense of the world alongside the participants. And both encourage the reader to come to similar conclusions: to take merely one example, that the growth of power and the fear of imperialism inevitably corrupt cities and individuals.

As we've noted, though scholars have identified areas of convergence and disagreement between the two thinkers, there is surprisingly little work done which imagines any relationship between the two. This is perhaps partly because Plato never speaks in his own name and Thucydides is remarkably reticent when it comes to inserting his own personal judgments into the *History*. However, I think a deeper reason for the neglect is a prejudice among commentators that Thucydides' genius, while substantial, is primarily historical—or rather non-philosophic.[19] Since Thucydides writes about a single

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[18] See T.K. Seung's discussion of the *Euthyphro* in T. K. Seung, *Plato Rediscovered: Human Value and Social Order* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996), 17-18.

[19] Bernard Williams is the most famous exception. Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993). Though he does not consider whether Plato is aiming at

political event, and does so in a manner somewhat akin to what we typically call "history," it is not terribly surprising that the general perception is that, though his work is extraordinarily thoughtful, it is not philosophy.[20] As a result, though Thucydides' work is frequently used as a source to paint the historical/cultural milieu in which Plato's dialogues take place, the *History* is seldom used as a genuine counterpart or contribution to political thought which can and should be considered alongside Plato's.

Instead, the typical view is that, while Thucydides can and should be turned to for instruction about power politics, ancient democracy, the role of deliberation in decision-making, and the causes of war, we should not look to him for any systematic philosophy or approach to political thought. As we've observed, those inclined to view his thought in this way frequently point out that the *History* is concerned with a specific or singular event and conclude from this that Thucydides' thought is too contextual to be anything other than captive to the prevailing intellectual environment. Given that the sophists and dramatists played prominent intellectual and cultural roles in classical Athens, it's unsurprising to read scholarly accounts that interpret Thucydides from the perspectives of classical drama or sophism.[21]

Thucydides, Raymond Geuss observes: "Williams's later work is…inspired by the ideal of what one might call a 'Thucydides who philosophizes.'" Raymond Geuss, *Outside Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 233.

[20] This understanding of history derives from Aristotle's distinction in the *Poetics* (1451a36-b11) between universals (which belong to poetry and philosophy) and particulars (which belong to history). Notice, however, that Aristotle refers here to *what* is studied, not *how* it is studied. Thucydides, I think, would place himself in the universals camp.

[21] See, for example: F. E. Adcock, *Thucydides and His History* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1973); Francis Macdonald Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus* (London: E. Arnold, 1907); Lowell Edmunds, *Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); Cynthia Farrar, *The Origins of Democratic Thinking: The Invention of Politics in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); John H. Finley, *Thucydides* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942); Simon Hornblower, *Thucydides* (London: Duckworth, 1987); Romilly, *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism*; H. D. Westlake, "Thucydides and the Pentekontaetia," *The Classical Quarterly* 5, no. 1/2 (1955). Scholars rarely make such a claim about Plato.

Thucydides certainly did not view himself or his work in this way. In fact, he made what at the time must have seemed an incredible boast but that has indeed come to pass, that the *History* is "a possession for all time" (1.22).[22] For Thucydides to claim that his work will have lasting value so long as "men have the same nature," he must believe that something universal rests at its core—for example, an understanding of human nature that gives shape and structure to his thinking (3.82).[23] I believe that when Thucydides suggests that the *History's* ultimate usefulness is not its account of the war, but its promise to contain an underlying truth applicable to the future, he is explicitly challenging his readers to seek a philosophic core at the heart of the *History* (1.22). This dissertation, then, may be considered a thought-experiment that takes Thucydides' claim to universality as a point of departure.

I believe Plato and Thucydides are much more similar than is often appreciated. To the charge that Thucydides' thought is more contextual than Plato's because his subject is a singular event, we would do well to keep in mind Leo Strauss' wonderful observation that: "Plato too can be said to have discovered in a singular event—in the singular life of Socrates—the universal and thus to have become able to present the universal through presenting a singular."[24] Both Thucydides and Plato approach their

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[22] Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Steven Lattimore (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1998). Unless otherwise specified, all references to Thucydides are from this edition.

[23] Marc Cogan interestingly distinguishes "that which is human" (*to anthropinon*) from "human nature" (*anthropeia phusis*). Marc Cogan, *The Human Thing: The Speeches and Principles of Thucydides' History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). It is indeed true that at 1.22 Thucydides does not use the words "human nature." He uses *to anthropinon*, "the human" instead—thereby failing to give us much guidance on exactly what we are supposed to learn from recurrent or similar actions as well as precisely how such an understanding would be "useful" (1.22). As I see it, there are at least two reasonable possibilities. Thucydides might mean that we can obtain knowledge that would help predict future events. However, given the importance of chance (*tuche*) in Thucydides' narrative, I am skeptical that Thucydides has in mind any robust predictive understanding. On the other hand, he might mean that by understanding the events in the *History*, we can better understand future events *once they have occurred*. To take a current example, perhaps if we sufficiently understood the *History*, we might be in a better position to make sense of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

[24] Strauss, *The City and Man*: 143.

audience primarily through the lens of singular events: the Peloponnesian War on the one hand, and the life of Socrates on the other. The two authors use similar narrative devices in their writing, most notably the rhetorical device of weaving speeches and events to raise philosophical arguments. Plato embeds the events of the war and its consequences inside philosophical dramas made up of speeches. Thucydides embeds speeches within the larger historical drama or narrative of the war. And both Plato and Thucydides use characters to embody various forms of sophistic rhetoric that lead directly to the hunger for power and a world of deeds without justice. This is a world in which only the power of the strong counts, as personified by the figures of Callicles in the *Gorgias*, Thrasymachus in the *Republic*, Cleon in the *History*, and Alcibiades, who figures in both Plato and Thucydides' works.[25]

Furthermore, both authors are painstaking in their shaping of context. This is perhaps more obvious in the case of Plato, since his dialogues are always, to one degree or another, dramas. However, Thucydides' *History* is no less artfully dramatic and context plays an equally important interpretive role, one that is often overlooked by commentators. In particular, the speeches—which comprise roughly half of the *History*—are placed with special care and not always at the most natural or expected points in the narrative. In my view, the best illustration of this is the Mytilenean Debate in Book III of the *History*, which Thucydides decides to place during a *second* assembly session that reconsiders the original vote to put all Mytilenean men to death. By placing the debate here rather than during the original vote—and Thucydides tells us that there were contrary opinions raised during the original vote as well—it allows Thucydides to offer a more subtle thematic debate (since the original vote was taken in a mood of

[25] Alcibiades is particularly ambiguous for Plato—for Socrates is in love with him even though his desire for power is proof positive of the *polis*' decay.

anger). The outcomes of such context-shaping decisions are important as well; had Thucydides staged the debate during the original vote over the relative merits of enslavement or execution, Cleon would have emerged as the victor rather than Diodotus.

An examination of how each thinker approaches his audience leads to an examination of what can be gained from imagining a relationship between the two thinkers. This is especially so because they write against the shared socio-political backdrop of the Peloponnesian War. If I do not find it rash to draw a parallel between Thucydides and Plato, it is because the works of both men came into existence during a period of crisis and strife. Both contain a critique of the status quo and direct us to a better world, which we can define on the basis of justice and peace.[26] Importantly, both men, to one degree or another, participated in the political world that they criticize. As Athenian citizens, both Thucydides and Plato had rights and duties to the city. This was no small matter in ancient Greece, where a man's identity was determined by his patronymic—who his father was and from which *polis* he came. Thucydides was elected as a general in 424 and was exiled for 20 years by the Athenians for his failure to keep Amphipolis from falling into Spartan hands. For his part, Plato's family was deeply involved in Athenian politics and likely encouraged him to take an active part. Critias, the most important and politically ruthless of the Thirty Tyrants, was his mother's cousin. If we are to believe the genuineness of Plato's letters, after witnessing the "unholy deeds" during the reign of terror by the Thirty, Plato withdrew from politics.[27] He supposedly

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[26] In the *Republic*, for example, Plato sets out his *Kallipolis* as a countermeasure to the prevailing social, political, cultural, and spiritual confusion through an analogy between the formation of a new state and an individual's spiritual development. Interestingly, Plato does not pursue this analogy in his other dialogues. Indeed, if any single thing may be said to define the *telos* in Plato's work, it is Socrates and the virtue (*arête*) he personifies. He is the nearest it is possible to come to an individual fulfilling the philosopher-king ideal that Plato establishes in the *Republic* as a counterweight to the decline of the moral status quo.
[27] *Letters* 325a.

re-entered politics after the fall of the Thirty only to see the Athenians condemn Socrates, "the most just of men then living," to death.[28]

While there have been few works that investigate in detail the relationship between Plato and Thucydides, commentators have made brief or parenthetical comparisons that typically highlight the incompatibility or conflictual relationship between the two. Generally speaking, comparisons fall into two camps that, for convenience, we will call Nietzschean or Periclean. As we've seen, the Nietzschean view sees Plato and Thucydides as essentially different and incompatible thinkers who concern themselves with separate planes of existence—Plato with the ephemeral world of thought or ideas in contradistinction to Thucydides' concern with the empirical. For Nietzscheans, the conflict between the two is one of Plato's idealism versus Thucydides' realism. The Periclean view sees the relationship between Plato and Thucydides to be equally conflictual, but sees the conflict as primarily one of politics. Pericleans read the *History* as Thucydides' lionization of Pericles.[29] Scholars persuaded by the Periclean view understand Thucydides primarily from the perspective of democratic statesmanship, a statesmanship where the ambition to rule is balanced by care for democratic practices. Naturally, such a perspective almost inevitably leads to viewing Plato in direct opposition to Thucydides. For, if Thucydides truly believes that Pericles is the ideal democratic ruler, then Socrates' remarks about Pericles in the *Gorgias* seem to directly oppose the Thucydidean view.[30] Let us briefly examine each perspective.

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[28] *Letters* 324e.

[29] I disagree with this understanding of Thucydides. As I will show in Chapter Three, Thucydides' assessment of Pericles is substantially more nuanced than many commentators believe.

[30] Indeed, Socrates attacks Pericles on three occasions in the dialogue—once in his encounter with Gorgias (455e-456a), and twice during his debate with Callicles (503c-d, 515d-519a) where Socrates accuses Pericles of being merely a flatterer of the Athenians—a gifted pastry-cook whose primary ability is the gratification of appetites. Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Donald Zeyl in *Plato Complete Works*, eds. John M. Cooper and D.S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 791-869. Unless otherwise specified, all references to Plato are from this edition.

In the chapter of *Twilight of the Idols* entitled "What I Owe the Ancients," Nietzsche praises Thucydides and characterizes the relationship between Thucydides and Plato as one of sickness and cure:

> My vacation, my preference, my *cure* for all things Platonic has always been *Thucydides*. Thucydides, and perhaps Machiavelli's *Principe*, are most closely related to me in terms of their unconditional will not to be fooled and to see reason in *reality*, *--not* in 'reason', and even less in 'morality'…Thucydides is the best cure for the 'classically educated' young man who has carried away a horrible, whitewashed image of the 'ideal' Greeks as the reward for his secondary-school training.[31]

The Platonic sickness which Nietzsche believes Thucydides can cure is, of course, *idealism*. Specifically, Nietzsche objects that Plato "already has 'good' as the highest concept."[32] By contrast, Thucydides:

> represents the most perfect expression of the *sophists' culture*, by which I mean the *realists' culture*; this invaluable movement right in the middle of the hoax of morals and ideals that was being perpetrated on all sides by the Socratic schools…Thucydides as the great summation, the final manifestation of that strong, severe, harsh objectivity that lay in the instincts of the more ancient Hellenes.[33]

Thus, Nietzsche sums up his view of the difference between Thucydides and Plato as primarily one of courage as opposed to self-deception, that "what divides natures like Thucydides from natures like Plato is courage in the face of reality: Plato is a coward in the face of reality,*--consequently*, he escapes into the ideal; Thucydides has *self*-control, and consequently he has control over things as well…"[34] Many commentators—particularly political scientists who study international relations—are persuaded by

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[31] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 225.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 225-26.
[34] Ibid., 226. For a more complete picture of how Nietzsche understands Thucydides, see John Zumbrunnen, "'Courage in the Face of Reality': Nietzsche's Admiration for Thucydides," *Polity* 35, no. 2 (2002).

Nietzsche's perspective. They are undoubtedly attracted by the darker aspects of Thucydides' *History*; for example, his pessimism about human nature and his frequent highlighting of the moral tragedy in international politics, as well as his sober assessment of fear, ambition, and advantage as prime motivators for action.[35] And they embrace the view that by focusing on political reality, Thucydides necessarily limits his capacity to present any meaningful philosophy. Let us briefly examine some of the most prominent Nietzscheans.

Lowell Edmunds argues that Thucydides is skeptical about the power of reason to govern human affairs.[36] The basic antithesis of the Athenian and Spartan perspectives gives rise to the central Thucydidean truth that there are limits to reason's capacity to foresee and overcome the unavoidable power of chance. He concludes that, *contra* Plato, "Thucydides never separated from its temporal manifestations what he believed was the eternal clarity he had attained, and he did not give his principles an existence independent of this world."[37] Thucydides concern with actual political life—which is always subject to chance—makes a Thucydidean philosophy essentially impossible. As Edmunds puts it, Thucydides is resigned to "a certain irrationality."[38]

Peter Pouncey views Thucydides' *History* as conveying a pessimism about human nature which he thinks "carries within itself drives that are destructive of its own achievement, that are in fact the same drives as those that build historical achievements in the first place, so that in a sense the way up and the way down are the same."[39] In this

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[35] Notice that many of these scholars take the Athenian theory of motivation—ambition, fear, and advantage—as Thucydides' own (1.76).
[36] Edmunds, *Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides*.
[37] Ibid., 169.
[38] Ibid., 209. Of course, it is unclear why philosophy must be wholly separate from the empirical—that is to say political—world.
[39] Peter R. Pouncey, *The Necessities of War: A Study of Thucydides' Pessimism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), xiii.

limited and perhaps dogmatic sense, Pouncey views Thucydides philosophically—Thucydides articulates an understanding of human nature, and the purpose of the *History* is to convey that understanding to the reader. However, Pouncey distinguishes Thucydides from philosophers like Plato because the orbit of Thucydides' concern is limited to "the causes of the events he describes," which is to say a view of human nature applicable only to the practical conduct of war.[40] Like Nietzsche, Pouncey is convinced that Thucydides remains unconcerned with morality and evaluative judgments as such.

Gregory Crane is perhaps the best-known exponent of the Nietzschean view.[41] For Crane, Thucydides sees through deceptive justifications and appearances to unearth the naked power politics that lies beneath. The *History* is a realist classic because it reveals how the strong dominate the weak and how interest trumps justice. Yet, Thucydides considered such behavior a fundamental *departure* from traditional Greek practice, in which foreign policy was an extension of aristocratic family connections that enmeshed leaders and their *poleis* in a web of mutual obligations. The Corinthian plea to the Athenian assembly not to ally with Corcyra because of Corinth's prior restraint during the Samian rebellion reflects this approach and uses the time-honored language and arguments of reciprocity. The Athenians reject the appeal because they formulate their interests and foreign policy on the basis of *immediate* interests. They act as if alliances are market transactions: short-term exchanges unaffected by past dealings. Thucydides considered this approach to politics destructive of the relationships that are the true source of security and prosperity. Pericles, who speaks on this question in his Funeral Oration, insists that the individual is nothing without the state, but at the time of

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[40] Ibid., x.

[41] Gregory Crane, *The Blinded Eye: Thucydides and the New Written Word* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996); Gregory Crane, *Thucydides and the Ancient Simplicity: The Limits of Political Realism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

the Sicilian debate Alcibiades reverses this formula, asserting that the state counts for nothing if it does not support him as an individual. Like Nietzsche, Crane also considers Plato's project to be qualitatively different from Thucydides:

> Plato, if he has achieved an even more prominent position in the Western canon [than Thucydides], did so by leaving the "real world" behind. Thucydides, more than any extant Greek thinker before him, balanced the general and the particular, following the phenomena wherever they led and refusing to give in to one side or the other. Thucydides never achieved a stable balance—for intellectual closure in human affairs is, of course, an impossibility—but he participated in, and indeed helped fashion, a practice of observation and analysis that we still pursue to this day.[42]

As we've seen, in *The City and Man*, Leo Strauss argues that Plato and Thucydides "may supplement one another."[43] For Strauss, Thucydides' *History* is "the quest for the 'common sense' understanding of political things which led us first to Aristotle's *Politics* lead us eventually to Thucydides' *War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians*."[44] Like Nietzsche, Strauss views Thucydides' realism, his ability to see "man as completely immersed in political life…in an unsurpassable, nay, unrivalled manner" as his most important attribute.[45] It is his realistic account of political life that makes Thucydides an important supplement to Plato. However, on the matter of which author is the more trenchant political thinker Strauss parts company with Nietzsche, saying of his brief analysis that: "All this amounts to saying that Thucydides' thought is inferior to Plato's thought."[46]

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[42] Crane, *Thucydides and the Ancient Simplicity: The Limits of Political Realism*: 19.
[43] Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 140.
[44] Strauss, *The City and Man*: 240.
[45] Ibid. It is interesting to note that in *The City and Man*, Strauss inverts the chronological order of composition, beginning with Aristotle and concluding with Thucydides, suggesting that Thucydides is perhaps the culmination of classical political philosophy, which teaches the recognition of the limits of politics. However, if this is Strauss' point, he makes it only elliptically or, to borrow his own famous distinction, esoterically.
[46] Ibid., 237.

Steven Forde argues that Thucydides is primarily interested in providing practical political instruction.[47] He suggests that the *History* instructs by illustrating the inconsistency and perhaps incoherence of moral conventions. For Forde, this is revealed most clearly by the relationship between Athens and Alcibiades. Alcibiades is the most daring man in Athens, and reflects the ambition that lies at the root of Athenian imperialism—he is the embodiment of the drivers of imperialism. However, Alcibiades' leadership is dangerous to Athens because his ambition—specifically, his feelings about what he deserves—often places his own interest above the city's. Forde concludes that it is Thucydides' treatment of political reality, the political world as it is not as it ought, that distinguishes his approach from Plato's.[48]

The Periclean view also understands the relationship between Plato and Thucydides as one of conflict. Pericleans believe that Thucydides' purpose in the *History* is to celebrate and idealize Pericles' rule—a view that Plato challenges. Pericleans note that Pericles represents Athens at the height of her power, and pay particular attention to Thucydides' opinion that, with Pericles at the helm, the Athenians may have prevailed in their war with Sparta.[49] In one of the rare moments where Thucydides speaks in his own voice, he describes Pericles' wisdom and foresight:

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[47] Steven Forde, *The Ambition to Rule: Alcibiades and the Politics of Imperialism in Thucydides* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Steven Forde, "Varieties of Realism: Thucydides and Machiavelli," *The Journal of Politics* 54, no. 2 (1992).

[48] Clifford Orwin is perhaps the most sophisticated Nietzschean, claiming that Thucydides does indeed have a philosophical purpose in the *History*. As he puts it, "Thucydides seeks to articulate an understanding of human affairs that transcends that fostered by any regime. This study is comparable to that of Plato or Aristotle, or any other of the greatest political thinkers." Clifford Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 11. Orwin therefore considers Thucydides to understand practical politics from a viewpoint outside of or greater than the specific conditions brought about by the Peloponnesian War itself. However, while accepting Thucydides into the ranks of political philosophers, Orwin never details exactly how, if at all, Thucydides relates to Plato or Aristotle.

[49] Thucydides, 2.65.

> For as long as he presided over the city in peacetime he led it with moderation and preserved it in safety and it became greatest in his hands, and when war broke out it is clear that he foresaw the power it had at this time…and after he died his foresight regarding the war was even more widely recognized…The reason was that he, influential through both reputation and judgment and notable for being most resistant to bribery, exercised free control over the people and was not led by them instead of leading them, because he did not speak to please in order to acquire power by improper means but, since he had this through his prestige, even contradicted them in their anger…And what was in name a democracy became in actuality rule by the first man. (2.65)

Pericles, then, should be understood as embodying the characteristics of the ideal democratic leader, and the purpose of the *History* is to train future statesmen to bring into being the ideal Athenian polity envisioned, but not realized, by Pericles. This is the general approach of two of the most famous commentators on Thucydides, John Finley and Jacqueline de Romilly.[50] For Finley, the *History* shows how human nature combines with general historical principles to create systematic or recognizable patterns in human affairs.[51] He argues that Thucydides is decisively influenced by the sophists, which explains Thucydides' belief in the power of reason, his use of arguments from likelihood (*eikos*), and his rhetorical use of antithesis. Given Plato's well-known hostility to the sophists, Finley concludes that the two thinkers are deeply at odds. Romilly takes a slightly different tack, arguing that Thucydides uncovers universal political laws from the specific events of the Peloponnesian War.[52] For Romilly, the subject that binds the *History* together is Athenian imperialism. Indeed, she correctly notes that the theme of Athenian imperialism is found in nearly every part of the *History*. However, what Romilly draws from this is Thucydides' desire to remedy Pericles' failures. According to Romilly, the Periclean ideal serves as Thucydides' normative standard and its failure simultaneously highlights inherent political limits. For Romilly, the lesson is that the

[50] Finley, *Thucydides*; Romilly, *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism*.
[51] Finley, *Thucydides*: 292-94.
[52] Note that for both authors Thucydides' essential contribution is practical rather than philosophical.

Periclean ideal will always—in the long run—be undercut by power politics, or the "law of the stronger." Plato's rejection of this thesis and his indictment of Pericles characterizes the essential disagreement between Thucydides and Plato.

Harvey Yunis argues that Thucydides presents Pericles as the exemplar of democratic statesmanship because he combined the ability and moral fortitude to persuade and instruct the Athenians as he led them.[53] The leaders who arose after Pericles lacked his abilities and his character, pandering to the Athenians' worst impulses and leading the city to ruin. Yunis argues that the *Gorgias* is Plato's response to Thucydides' Pericles. Opposing Thucydides' glorification of Athenian power, Plato highlights the inherently corrosive influence of her imperial ambitions. Hence, the argument between the two thinkers is not one of realism or idealism, but of politics.

Most recently, Sara Monoson describes Pericles' Funeral Oration as an attempt "to articulate an idealization of democratic citizenship."[54] Monoson argues that Pericles' insistence that Athenians gaze upon their city as lovers is a simulacrum of actual cultural understandings of the proper relationship of adult male lovers to their younger male beloveds. In particular, she notes that the unique, culturally praiseworthy character of that relationship did not involve the presence of domination but the mutual enrichment that stems from equal reciprocal exchanges. By virtue of his use of this metaphor, Pericles infuses his ideal of democratic citizenship with images of equal, reciprocal relations among citizens that are open to progressive reform. To make this point, Monoson draws on the abundant recent scholarship on ancient Greek sexual practices that shows how their particular erotic character was itself governed by criteria of social

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[53] Harvey Yunis, *Taming Democracy: Models of Political Rhetoric in Classical Athens* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

[54] S. Sara Monoson, "Citizen as Erastes: Erotic Imagery and the Idea of Reciprocity in the Periclean Funeral Oration," *Political Theory* 22, no. 2 (1994): 266.

propriety and status. This allowed references to erotic activity to be used metaphorically by rhetoricians in politically specific ways. Monoson, therefore, reads Pericles' Funeral Oration as a genuine encomium to an attractive democratic ideal. Naturally, given Plato's less than sanguine views on democracy, Monoson turns to Plato to raise concerns over the Periclean account.[55]

The Nietzschean and Periclean perspectives, then, view the relationship between Thucydides and Plato as one of either incompatibility or conflict. Plato and Thucydides either live in wholly different worlds or else their disagreements are so fundamental as to make engagement a futile exercise. In this dissertation, I contest these long-standing views by taking seriously the idea that the relationship between Plato and Thucydides is one of compatibility and congruence. In keeping with the authors' spirits, I use an expositional strategy they both employed to help bring their ideas into the same orbit: *antilogy*. In doing so, I recognize that this is not Socrates' preferred method of argumentation. Early in the *Republic*, Socrates highlights the difference between his dialectical elenchus and the typical antilogical approach when asking Glaucon how they might persuade Thrasymachus that the just life is more profitable than the life of injustice:

> If we oppose him with a parallel speech about the blessings of the just life, and then he replies, and then we do, we'd have to count and measure the good things mentioned on each side, and we'd need a jury to decide the case. But if, on the other hand, we investigate the question, as we've been doing, by seeking agreement with each other, we ourselves can be both jury and advocates at once. (347e-348b) [56]

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[55] Susan Sara Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements: Athenian Politics and the Practice of Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[56] Unsurprisingly, Nietzsche draws a different conclusion: "One choses dialectic only when one has no other means. One knows that one arouses mistrust with it, that it is not very persuasive. Nothing is easier to erase than a dialectical effect; the experience of every meeting at which there are speeches proves this. It can only be *self-defense* for those who no longer have other weapons." Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*.

To add insult to injury, from Plato's perspective at least, most of the arguments I make are grounded in *eikos*—the likely, probable, or reasonable. Given the subject matter under investigation, I am comfortable using *eikos* as an evaluative standard, though this is not meant to signal any favoritism on my part for sophist epistemology. As an example of how I rely on *eikos* as a standard, Chapters Two, Three, and Four each discuss specific textual allusions that link Plato and Thucydides in order to establish Plato's familiarity with Thucydides' *History*. Given the availability of the evidence, I am surprised that this remains a controversial suggestion. I want to emphasize that I do not consider my interpretations of the textual allusions to be original at every point. Many of the riddles that link the *History* to Plato's dialogues have either been hinted at or explicitly made by one or more commentators.[57] Nevertheless, these answers have generally gone unnoticed and, so far as I can tell, there is no single treatment that contains them all.

Let us briefly examine the two most obvious pieces of evidence that Plato had read Thucydides: their similar accounts of the introduction of athletic nudity in Greece, and the textual allusions in the *Menexenus* that refer to Pericles' Funeral Oration in the *History*. In attempting to settle the issue of when Greek athletes began to exercise nude, Myles McDonnell argues that Plato must have read Thucydides, based on both authors' accounts of the practice's history.[58] Thucydides and Plato both report that it was only just before their own time that Greeks stopped wearing the *zoma*[59] and began competing in the nude. Thucydides' discussion of athletic nudity occurs in his discussion of early

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[57] I would be remiss not to point out Simon Hornblower's interesting speculation that Thucydides and Plato are linked because they both knew Socrates. As Hornblower puts it: "The link might be Thucydidean borrowing from Socrates, or Thucydidean desire to reply to Socrates, rather than Platonic echoing of Thucydides." Hornblower, *Thucydides*: 126.

[58] Myles McDonnell, "The Introduction of Athletic Nudity: Thucydides, Plato, and the Vases," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 111(1991).

[59] A leather or felt cloth.

Greek history in the so-called Archaeology (1.1-1.18). In a digression on social customs, Thucydides remarks that:

> [The Lacedaemonians] were also the first to strip publicly for athletics and anoint themselves with oil afterward; the old way was for athletes to compete with their genitals covered, even in the Olympic games, and this ended *quite recently*. (1.6, italics mine)

In Book V of the *Republic*, Socrates, arguing in support of women exercising in the nude, concedes that the idea might seem ridiculous, but tells his interlocutors that:

> it was *not very long ago* that the Greeks themselves thought it shameful and ridiculous (as the majority of the barbarians still do) for even men to be seen naked and that when the Cretans and then the Lacedaemonians began the gymnasiums, the wits of those times could also have ridiculed it all. (452c, italics mine)

McDonnell examines a litany of archaeological and other evidence that indicate both an early innovation of athletic nudity and its prevalence in Athens from 550 B.C. (at the latest) that is difficult to square with Thucydides' and Plato's accounts. Though Plato's reliability on historical matters is suspect, his references almost always serve a pedagogical purpose. McDonnell notes that the veracity of Plato's account in the *Republic* is different from what he writes elsewhere about distinctive Cretan and Spartan social customs. In a number of places,[60] Plato states that it was the Cretan and Spartan lawgivers who established gymnasia as defining practices for their *poleis*. And in the *Laws*, Plato makes clear that the exercise was conducted in the nude "by making an explicit causal connection between the institution of the gymnasion and homosexual behavior. For it was the nudity practiced at the gymnasion which made it the natural and normal place to observe, admire, and make advances to handsome youths."[61] Of course,

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[60] See *Laws* 633a, 636a, 636b-c; *Protagoras* 342c-e; *Republic* 548b.

[61] McDonnell, "The Introduction of Athletic Nudity: Thucydides, Plato, and the Vases," 191. See *Laws* 636c.

if the Cretan and Spartan lawgivers established gymnasia, then it could not properly be described as being established "not very long ago."

McDonnell argues that Plato was familiar with Thucydides' work "and took the information about the recent introduction of athletic nudity directly from his history"[62] on several grounds: (1) the diction in the respective passages is almost identical, (2) Plato uses a distinctively Thucydidean analogy in comparing the customs of early Greeks with contemporary barbarians,[63] (3) Dionysius of Halicarnassus states that Plato modeled Socrates' mock funeral oration in the *Menexenus* after Pericles' in Thucydides' *History*[64] and, therefore, was familiar with it, (4) the two speeches contain too many similarities to be plausibly due to chance, and (5) Plato's identification of Aspasia as the supposed author of Socrates' oration is difficult to explain if Plato were unaware of Thucydides' account of Pericles' Funeral Oration. To this we might add a sixth reason for believing the connection. In the *Menexenus*' frame scene, Socrates remarks to Menexenus that one of the problems with funeral orations is that "even if he [the dead man] was of little account, he gets a eulogy too from the lips of experts" simply because he died in battle (234c). Linda Coventry notes that of all the funeral speeches that have come down to us from antiquity, only Pericles' Funeral Oration in Thucydides shares this admission (at 2.42).[65]

Since the *Menexenus* is relevant to establishing a strong circumstantial case for Plato's familiarity with Thucydides, let us briefly examine the connection. Harvey Yunis

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[62] Ibid., 192.

[63] Indeed, McDonnell states that "[the German classicist] Junther was probably right to claim that Plato learned this historian's method of analogy from Thucydides." Ibid.

[64] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Critical Essays*, trans. Stephen Usher (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 30.

[65] Lucinda Coventry, "Philosophy and Rhetoric in the *Menexenus*," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 109(1989). Strangely, after identifying this rather startling fact, Coventry then goes on to conclude that the *Menexenus* is aimed at Athens itself.

points out that Thucydides was "the only useful source for Periclean rhetoric available to Plato."[66] Since Pericles left no written record of his various speeches, any attempt to study him as a rhetorician would have suffered the potentially fatal blow of lacking any primary evidence.[67] Though Plato would likely have had access to some older individuals who heard Pericles speak, the relatively few recollected lines would have been of little use for his interest in Periclean rhetoric. Since Plato investigated Periclean rhetoric as a way of understanding Athens' greatest leader and rhetor, Yunis argues that: "Plato and his contemporaries would have encountered the same lack of direct access that we do, and they too would have naturally turned to Thucydides to supply the deficiency."[68]

In the *Menexenus*, Socrates says that Pericles' consort Aspasia "produced—among with a multitude of other good ones—the one outstanding orator among the Greeks, Pericles" (235e). Socrates further insists that he was himself taught by Aspasia and that the funeral oration he will deliver to Menexenus is made up of "bits and pieces… [Aspasia] thought up before, at the time when she was composing the funeral oration which Pericles delivered" (236b). Several passages in Socrates' oration imitate that of Thucydides' Pericles such that we are directed to Thucydides' account when Socrates refers to "the funeral oration which Pericles delivered." Charles Kahn notes that both Socrates and Pericles begin their orations with the same double antithesis of speech and

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66 Yunis, *Taming Democracy: Models of Political Rhetoric in Classical Athens*: 136.

67 Yunis remarks that the lack of primary source material "was no less true for Plato, one generation after Pericles, than it is for us." Ibid., 137.

68 Ibid. It would not be unusual for Plato—or any Greek writer—to not acknowledge a contemporary, as we would today. As Yunis observes: "Ancient Greek writers are frequently reticent about their sources…Plato had no interest in advertising his differences with a recently dead historian; he wanted to keep his reader's mind focused solely on the argument about political rhetoric." Ibid., 137-38. Yunis makes the error, in my view, of assimilating Pericles' position to that of Thucydides' himself.

deed, *logos* and *ergon*,[69] followed immediately by a reference to the requirements of custom, or *nomos*. Furthermore, "in both cases the speaker emphasizes the fact that not only the burial rite but also the oration itself is prescribed by a law which the speaker must respect."[70]

The second allusion is perhaps more significant. Socrates refers to the city of Athens in his speech, remarking that: "One man calls our polity democracy, another some other name that pleases him; in reality, it is government by the best men along with popular consent" (238c-d). Thucydides' Pericles also uses the same verb, *kalein*, to describe the Athenian *polis*: "In name it is called a democracy on account of it being administered in the interest not of the few but the many." (2.37). However, the real allusion here is not to Pericles' Funeral Oration, but to Thucydides' judgment of Athens under Pericles: "what was in name a democracy became in actuality rule by the first man" (2.65). As Kahn puts it: "Plato says that whatever one may call this constitution, it is really rule by the best men with the approval of the many. Again the echo is clear, and since these words are not found in a speech but in the comment of the historian they show that what Plato has in mind is…the published work of Thucydides himself."[71]

Finally, Plato essentially calls Thucydides out by name in the *Menexenus*' frame scene. After claiming Aspasia as his teacher, Socrates claims that her instruction has left him a superior rhetor than "someone less well educated than I—a man who learned…oratory from Antiphon the Rhamnusian" (236a). Since Pericles was not Antiphon's student, to whom is Socrates referring? Almost certainly the answer must be

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[69] Charles H. Kahn, "Plato's Funeral Oration: The Motive of the *Menexenus*," *Classical Philology* 58, no. 4 (1963).

[70] Ibid., 222. Kahn notes that "Plato echoes the Thucydidean figure here only to make the precisely opposite point." Ibid.

[71] Ibid., 222-23. However, Kahn believes, as I do not, that it is "inevitable that Plato and Thucydides should disagree—and disagree profoundly—in their appreciation of Pericles." Ibid., 223.

Thucydides, for two reasons. The first is that Marcellinius states that Thucydides studied philosophy with Anaxagoras and rhetoric with Antiphon.[72] Though some consider Marcellinius unreliable,[73] Thucydides' own extraordinary praise of Antiphon in the *History* is sufficient to establish Plato's linking of the two. In his own voice, Thucydides says Antiphon:

> [was] a man second to no Athenian of his time in ability and a master both at developing plans and at stating his conclusions, and while he was not one to come forward in the assembly or go willingly into any other scene of contention but was regarded with suspicion by the people because of a reputation for cleverness, he was nevertheless the one man most able to help those contending in law courts or in the assembly whenever anyone consulted him. An in addition, after the democracy had been changed back, and Antiphon was brought to trial at a later time when the actions of the Four Hundred had been reversed and were being dealt with harshly by the assembly, it is clear that he in person, on trial for these very actions, as a collaborator, made the best defense on a capital charge of all men up to my time. (8.68)

In the following chapters, I will weave Plato's allusions to Thucydides' *History* into a larger narrative of how the two thinkers treat the problem of Athenian imperialism. The arc of the dissertation is as follows. In order to help situate the reader, Chapter One examines two of the most infamous episodes in Thucydides' *History*, the Corcyrean Civil War and the Melian Dialogue. These two incidents help illuminate Thucydides' understanding of the human motivations that generate and support the manifestation of greed that inexorably leads to imperialism. Because many of Plato's textual and thematic references are to these passages, it is instructive to begin here.

Because I argue that Plato and Thucydides agree that the underlying cause of Athenian imperialism can be attributed to a combination of greed (*pleonexia*) and the

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[72] See Timothy Burns, "Marcellinius' *Life of Thucydides*, translated, with an introductory essay," *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 38, no. 1 (2010).
[73] Judith Maitland, "'Marcellinus" Life of Thucydides: Criticism and Criteria in the Biographical Tradition," *The Classical Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (1996).

internalization by the Athenians of specific sophistic teachings that support unbridled appetitiveness as the best way to live, the remaining chapters will examine some of the most prominent sophists in the Platonic corpus: Gorgias, Polus, Callicles, Protagoras, and Thrasymachus. Chapter Two takes Thucydides' accounts of the Corcyrean Civil War and the Melian Dialogue as points of departure and shows how Plato's *Gorgias* can be read as a radical—but ultimately unsatisfactory—critique of the politics of greed. Plato puts a particular phrase into the mouth of Callicles that is designed to direct our attention to Thucydides' account of the Melian Dialogue in order to demonstrate the practical implications of Gorgianic rhetoric. Plato's solution to the problem of Callicles in the *Gorgias*, however, rests at the individual level—developing the self in order to bring justice and truth to the world (and thereby eradicate evil). For it is Socrates' and Plato's profound belief that evil is caused by a failure of insight: those who through personal development have acquired insight into goodness will act on that basis and thereby find happiness. Once individuals do this, it becomes impossible for them in the future to act in bad faith, as they would then make themselves unhappy. On the other hand, evil men act out of a fundamental lack of wisdom, as they believe themselves omniscient, driven by the tyranny of their subconscious desires and hubris. However, Socrates' solution here is fundamentally apolitical and, as such, is defective, partial, or inadequate to the task.

Chapter Three extends this theme and shows how a textual flag in the *Protagoras* that directly refers to Pericles' first speech in the *History* unlocks a more comprehensive critique of the Periclean Age by both Plato and Thucydides. The fundamental disagreement between Socrates and Callicles in the *Gorgias* concerns the question of justice—the quintessential political virtue. However, like Thucydides, Plato recognizes that the problem of Athenian imperialism results from *collective* rather than

individual behavior. As such, an adequate response to the *ethos* of power politics and greed requires the political virtue of justice which Socrates only hints at in the *Gorgias*, but develops more fully in the *Protagoras*. The *Protagoras* introduces the new themes of the political art (or political wisdom) which, for Plato, is primarily or essentially the art of educating the young such that they will be effective citizens and leaders. Unlike Gorgias, Protagoras introduces and rhetorically emphasizes the necessity of justice for the existence of communities. And he understands that justice must be redefined from its traditional or Homeric understanding.

In the *Iliad*, justice (*dike*) is not a principal virtue; it is subordinate to a conception of virtue (*arête*) that is closely associated with battlefield excellence: courage, strength, or cunning. Whenever justice enters into the poem, it does so in the context of these warrior-like characteristics. The necessity of redefining justice is illustrated in the poem's opening scene. Recall that the *Iliad* begins with a quarrel raging between Agamemnon and Achilles. After we learn that the plague that has descended on the Greek camp is a result of Agamemnon's refusal to release a young woman he had taken captive, he reluctantly releases her, but only after he is compensated by taking Briseis, Achilles' prize girl. Achilles objects and exacts revenge by withdrawing his troops and, more importantly, his own *arête*, from the battlefield. The calamities that ensue for the Greeks form the tragic story that occupies the rest of the poem. For our purposes, it is important to note that this traditional conception of justice is primarily associated with vengeance. In the midst of a later battle, Agamemnon's brother Menelaus is about to spare the life of one of their Trojan enemies. When Agamemnon arrives on the scene, he exhorts:

"Going soft, Menelaus? What does this man

Mean to you? Have the Trojans ever shown you

Any hospitality? Not one of them

Escapes sheer death at our hands, not even

The boy who is still in his mother's womb.

Every Trojan dies, unmourned and unmarked."

And so the hero changed his brother's mind

By reminding him of the ways of conduct and fate.

Menelaus shoved Adrastus aside,

And Agamemnon stabbed him in the flank.

He fell backward, and the son of Atreus

Braced his heel on his chest and pulled out the spear.[74]

The traditional understandings of justice (articulated here) are either fair distribution of rewards (in Achilles rage against Agamemnon) or, more commonly, revenge. As Protagoras and Plato know, neither of these understandings provides the necessary ground for a community to flourish. So Socrates will argue that the best life is one that combines the five classic virtues of piety, courage, temperance, wisdom and justice—and that virtue, properly understood, is the truest form of pleasure. Unlike the *Gorgias*, however, the *Protagoras* shows that to the extent that individual virtue conflicts with civic virtue or the common good, focusing on the individual alone can exacerbate the problem by introducing a *selfish* understanding of the good. Taken too far, this selfishness transforms into tyranny and this fact drives the need for justice, which serves to moderate the conflict between selfishness and the common good.

[74] Homer, *Iliad*, trans. Stanley Lombardo (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), VI: 55-65.

Chapter Four builds on the prior two and shows how the *Republic* may be read as a logical extension of Plato's response to the problems of imperialism and greed embodied in Callicles. In doing so, we will be guided by Plato's textual allusion to Thucydides' account of the revolution on Corcyra. Socrates' solution to Callicles' *ethos* of aggression, greed and tyranny in the *Gorgias* is primarily individual—the happy life devoted to individual virtue. In the *Protagoras*, Socrates shows the necessity for the virtue of justice to moderate the conflict between individual and civic virtue. The *Republic* is Plato's attempt to harmonize individual and civic virtue. In order to do this, Plato will need to shift the focus of the Greek Enlightenment as applied to the political world by re-educating the people. Following Plato's solution in the *Republic*, we will examine Thucydides' *History* as a whole to construct a Thucydidean solution to the problem of greed and imperialism that I believe is congruent with Plato's.

A brief methodological coda on how I interpret Plato. I confess that while I characterize positions as Plato's, I acknowledge the problems in doing so. As we've mentioned, Plato never speaks in his own voice (in contrast to Thucydides' mere reticence), but instead puts every word in the mouth of a fictional character. Paul Woodruff is correct to describe Plato's work as "historical fiction"[75]—but, as he points out, one with a philosophical purpose. Even Socrates is not designated as an authority to be believed without examination. Indeed, Socrates' claims of ignorance, liberal use of irony, and use of rhetorical maneuvers invite readers to adopt a critical stance to authority figures more generally and to open themselves to different arguments. All of this makes it extremely difficult to say that we can reliably turn to Socrates as Plato's mouthpiece. Socrates plays a more difficult and complex part: sometimes he asks questions, other

[75] Paul Woodruff, "Rhetoric and relativism: Protagoras and Gorgias," in T*he Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 291.

times he answers them, sometimes he advances his own arguments, other times he examines and refutes the arguments of others.

However, we need not conclude from this that we can say nothing about what Plato himself thought. Instead, we can piece together his thinking by drawing inferences about what he may have thought based on the way he presents various issues and problems in the dialogues. Ironically, this method ultimately relies on the very principle that Socrates so often rails at against the sophists: *eikos* (what is likely or probable)—but understood here as the best explanation given the various possibilities.[76] Despite how it might initially appear, I do not think this interpretative principle does violence to Plato's intent. Socrates' arguments often contain fallacious elements and Socrates himself gives the reader clues to see why many of his arguments are tentative or provisional rather than definitive. For example, in the *Republic*, Socrates never claims to have certain *knowledge* of the Form of the Good. As such, he cannot and does not claim absolute or unqualified *knowledge* about whether it is always good to be just. He only claims that he himself is totally persuaded of it. This comports with our everyday experience—since we are not philosopher-kings (who alone have knowledge of the Good), we live our lives and make our decisions based on our deeply held convictions about what is good. I do not think this should surprise us, since I think Plato *wants* us to struggle to draw our own conclusions about the best way each of us should live. For Plato, this isn't a responsibility that can or should be abdicated—for example, examining the value of justice requires one to *decide* about the goals of one's own life.[77]

A final word. One theme that runs through the thought of both Plato and Thucydides (and I hope is reflected in every chapter of this dissertation) is their

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[76] See Woodruff (1997), 296-298 for a more detailed discussion of *eikos*.

[77] *Republic*, 545a-b. Socrates answer is, I think, relatively simple: his life is the answer.

humanism. My readings of both thinkers present them as resolute, courageous thinkers who directly faced challenges remarkably similar to those we face today. I believe we make a fatal mistake by failing to come to terms with the human reality that lies behind both thinkers' works, because it is only in doing so that we may discover exactly who we are and exactly what values we stand for. By attending to the humanity of Plato and Thucydides, we both celebrate their respective geniuses as well as focus our attention on what they have to offer a world that seems increasingly poised between materialism and fundamentalism.

Chapter 1: Thucydides on the Foundations of Imperialism

Thucydides' account of the revolution (*stasis*) at Corcyra is justly famous for laying bare the limits of political community and underscoring the possibilities open to a human nature unfettered by the restraining influence of law and custom (*nomos*). It is here, in his retelling of the violence, where he makes perhaps his most remembered remark that war "is a violent teacher" (3.82). It is important to note that Thucydides reserves the analysis of the Corcyrean episode to himself, rather than one of the actors in the *History*. Here, in one of the few places he speaks in his own voice, he very candidly reveals his own understanding of human nature, power, and greed.[78] In my view, he uses the Corcyrean revolution to lay the groundwork for his critique of the Athenian Empire as a whole. Indeed, Thucydides pays particular attention to the *stasis* at Corcyra because it is the first of many that will eventually engulf the whole of Greece.

Thucydides describes how the civil strife transpired as follows. In one of the opening salvos of the Peloponnesian War, Athens supported Corcyra in their conflict with Corinth because they coveted Corcyra's navy. In 427, tensions between the oligarchs and democrats within Corcyra were inflamed; the democrats requested aid from Athens and the oligarchs aid from Sparta. The Spartans arrived first, but an Athenian fleet quickly followed and the Spartans fled, giving the Corcyrean democrats the confidence and political room they needed to slaughter the oligarchs and their supporters. During the massacre, approximately four hundred supporters of the oligarchs took refuge in the Temple of Hera. Thucydides recalls the ensuing carnage:

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[78] Simon Hornblower considers this episode to be "the most substantial expression of direct personal opinion [in the *History*]" in Simon Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1991), 478.

> [The Corcyrean democrats] came into the temple of Hera and persuaded fifty of the oligarchic sympathizers who had taken sanctuary there to submit themselves to a trial; then they condemned them all to death. When they saw what was being done, most of the suppliants—all those who were not induced to stand trial by law—killed one another right there in the temple; some hanged themselves on trees, and everyone made away with himself by what means he could. For the seven days the Athenian admiral Eurymedon stayed there with his sixty ships, the Corcyreans went on killing as many of their own people as they took to be their enemies. They accused them of subverting the democracy, but some of the victims were killed on account of private hatred, and some by their debtors for the money they had lent them. *Every form of death was seen at this time; and (as tends to happen in such cases) there was nothing people would not do, and more: fathers killed their sons*; men were dragged out of the temples and then killed. (3.81, italics mine)[79]

The upheaval (*metabolai*) in Corcyra was so great as to create a state of affairs where men "reversed the usual way of using words to evaluate activities" (3.82).[80] When words—the classic instance of conventions that help govern society—change their meanings, the very possibility of community or an expressible common good is made impossible. Plato, too, appears to draw on Thucydides' account in his discussion of constitutional change in Book VIII of the *Republic*.[81] Socrates here describes the transformation of language as the soul moves from oligarchy to democracy:

> Socrates: Doing battle and controlling things themselves, won't they [desires] call reverence foolishness and moderation cowardice, abusing them and casting them out beyond the frontiers like disenfranchised exiles? And won't they persuade the young man that measured and orderly expenditure is boorish and mean, and, joining with many useless desires, won't they expel it across the border?
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> Adeimantus: They certainly will.

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[79] Woodruff translation. Thucydides, *On Justice, Power, and Human Nature: The Essence of Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War*.

[80] There are two items worth attention here. First is that Thucydides uses the same word, *metabolai*, to describe both the revolution at Corcyra and the plague that ravages Athens in Book II. Second, we note with interest the fact that in Hobbes' state of nature, words also have no precise definitions and require a sovereign to provide a shared meaning.

[81] R.B. Rutherford believes this to be "the best candidate for actual imitation of the historian [Thucydides] by Plato." Rutherford, *The Art of Plato: Ten Essays in Platonic Interpretation*: 67.

> Socrates: Having thus emptied and purged these from the soul of the one they've possessed and initiated in splendid rites, they proceed to return insolence, anarchy, extravagance, and shamelessness from exile in a blaze of torchlight, wreathing them in garlands and accompanying them with a vast chorus of flowers. They praise the returning exiles and give them fine names, calling insolence good breeding, anarchy freedom, extravagance magnificence, and shamelessness courage. Isn't it in some such way as this that someone who is young changes, after being brought up with necessary desires, to the liberation and release of useless and unnecessary pleasures?
>
> Adeimantus: Yes, that's clearly the way it happens. (560c-561a)

Unfortunately, the linguistic somersault on Corcyra was a mere harbinger of the carnage to come.[82] As definitions eroded, the values which words signified began to be ignored as well. Other bonds began to supplant and destroy those of *philia*, one of the Ancient Greek words for love. For the Greeks, *philia* meant a friendly love or affection for another and was understood in contrast to the passionate desire and yearning that they called *eros*. *Philia* could extend to loyalty or friendship to kin, friends, and even the city (*polis*) itself. As J. R. Wilson explains, *philia* signifies the "continuum of attachment that extends in a stable system of relationships from the self to one's immediate family and friends and then outwards to one's *polis* and one's race."[83] Loyalty to political party or faction soon trumped devotion to family and, for Thucydides, once this occurred, the possibility of political community was lost. A man's "own" should include his immediate (and then extended) family, and ultimately include the community of his city (*polis*). But, on Corcyra, where fathers killed their own sons and the ties of *philia* within even the household were violated, "kinship became more foreign than party tie" (3.82.6). It's hard not to agree with Nicole Loraux's assessment that this represents the essence of

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[82] Quentin Skinner argues that modern political thought is inaugurated when Hobbes (who first translated Thucydides' *History* into English), takes exception (*stasis*) to represent the usual or starting point from which politics begins. Quentin Skinner, "Hobbes on Rhetoric and the Construction of Morality," in *Visions of Politics*, ed. Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 87-141.

[83] John R. Wilson, "Shifting and Permanent *Philia* in Thucydides," *Greece & Rome* 36, no. 02 (1989): 147.

stasis for Thucydides: "[he] would have liked to condense all its horror in the murder of a son by his father."[84]

When partisanship replaces religion, family, honor, or citizenship as the foundation of trust and value, the moderation necessary to encourage the search for the common good evaporates. Without the *nomoi* created and nourished by the *polis* (and/or a belief in the gods to enforce the keeping of promises), all relationships (including family relationships as well as those based on commerce and trade) were sacrificed on Corcyra at the altar of debased self-interest. According to Thucydides, the revolution released or revealed certain essential aspects of human nature: greed, violence, revenge, and a lust for equality and power. Once released, these forces inexorably led to suspiciousness among citizens, since each one recognized that if others are acting like themselves, then everyone is pursuing their own very narrow self-interest. The demise of trust (*pistis*) signaled the end of politics. Individuals began to trust one another only when they came together to break a law or violate custom—that is, whenever they were partners in crime. Revenge became especially sweet whenever it involved treachery. Oaths became worthless because everyone would break them when it furthered their own advantage. This collapse of trust, formerly the glue that held the community together, was a direct consequence of individuals' willingness to do whatever was in their power to advance their own interests, even when this meant throwing out long-established notions of what properly belonged to others, the community, or the gods.

Thucydides locates the cause of the revolution in the love of gain (*pleonexia*) and the love of honor (*philotimia*)—the substituting of public ambitions with private ones (3.82). The individual replaces the community (and the gods) as the arbiter of

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[84] Nicole Loraux, *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 39.

determining what is good. How and why did this occur at Corcyra? The civil war there resulted from the conflict between democratic and oligarchic factions over who would rule (*arche*). The conflict was inextricably linked with the status of Corcyra's relationship with Athens. The oligarchs considered the alliance with democratic Athens tantamount to enslaving themselves and recognized that, in order to prevent this, they would need to consolidate power. To make this happen, they would need Spartan assistance. On the other side, the democrats saw the alliance with Athens as a chance to gain lasting political advantage over the oligarchs. The political division reflected the underlying economic division in Ancient Greece: oligarchs were rich and democrats were poor. According to Thucydides: "All this was caused by leadership based on greed (*pleonexian*) and ambition (*philotimian*) and led in turn to fanaticism once men were committed to the power struggle" (3.82).

Thucydides' careful unpacking of the causes of the conflict at Corcyra helps us understand his diagnosis of the Athenian Empire. He begins by underscoring the consequences of civil war in one of the most famous passages in the *History*:

> Civil war brought many hardships to the cities, such as happen and will always happen as long as human nature is the same, although they may be less or more violent or take different forms, depending on the circumstances in each case. In peace and prosperity, cities and private individuals alike are better minded because they are not plunged into the necessity of doing anything against their will; but war is a violent teacher: it gives most people impulses that are as bad as their situation when it takes away the easy supply of what they need for daily life. (3.82)

At first blush it may appear that Thucydides thinks people are morally better during times of peace and prosperity—that it is only when they aren't able to satisfy what they need for daily life that people are reduced to adopting any means necessary to satisfy their needs. According to this view, we might understand Thucydides here to be conducting a

thought experiment whereby he progressively deprives people of their daily needs in order to determine their natural or true motivations which are ordinarily hidden by conditions of peace and prosperity. I don't consider Thucydides to be drawing quite so dark a conclusion here. Rather, I think it is important to notice precisely what Thucydides argues is affected by war: people's "better mindedness" or, in Greek, their *gnome*—judgment, good sense, intelligence or prudence. What civil war does is remove the constraints that help keep our judgment more sound or our sense good. It renders our impulses as bad as the situation or circumstances it creates—in this case, violent ones.

By removing calmness, order, and satisfied appetites, civil war replaces better-mindedness and moderation with violent passion, greed, and self-interest. Thucydides clarifies how this substitution occurs:

> So the condition of the cities was civil war, and where it came later, awareness of earlier events pushed to extremes the revolution in thinking, both in extraordinarily ingenious attempts to seize power and in outlandish retaliations. And in self-justification men inverted the usual verbal evaluations of actions. Irrational recklessness was now considered courageous commitment, hesitation while looking to the future was high-styled cowardice, moderation was a cover for lack of manhood, and circumspection meant inaction, while senseless anger now helped to define a true man, and deliberation for security was a specious excuse for dereliction. The man of violent temper was always credible, anyone opposing him was a suspect. (3.82)

Words changed their meanings, then, in the following sense: men began to apply the word *courage* not to what the community traditionally considered authentic acts of courage but rather to acts of irrational recklessness. Thucydides argues that the reason that words were able to change their meanings (at least so quickly) was due to the fact that men's judgment (*gnome*) was no longer sound—it became twisted by their passions. And the specific passions that caused "all this" (including the fanaticism and subsequent slaughter) was the desire to rule based on greed (*pleonexian*) and ambition (*philotimian*):

> For the leading men in the cities, through their emphasis on an attractive slogan for each side—political equality for the masses, the moderation of aristocracy—treated as their prize the public interest to which they paid lip service and, competing by every means to get the better of one another, boldly committed atrocities and proceeded to still worse acts of revenge, stopping at limits set by neither justice nor the city's interest but by the gratification of their parties at every stage, and whether by condemnations through unjust voting or by acquiring superiority in brute force, both sides were ready to satisfy to the utmost their immediate hopes of victory. (3.82)

The desire to rule, the distortion of judgment, and the inversion of language that helps secure sound judgment all arise through the passions of greed (*pleonexia*) and ambition (*philotimia*). However, for Thucydides there is no easy escape since both judgment and the passions are equally part of human nature. Indeed, the problem arises when circumstances cause men's judgments to not consider arguments from justice that caution against the arrogant use of power. Thucydides tells us that the taking of power was not itself the end at which the revolutionaries aimed. Instead, he says that the lust for power originated in the desire for things other than power, especially material goods and *time*—honor, or fame. Power, then, is the means rather than the end—it serves as the instrument through which material goods and psychological needs are acquired and satisfied. The ends remain such things as: private property, the pleasures of violence and revenge, and the honors of public competition.[85] Thucydides suggests that greed (*pleonexia*) is conceptually distinct from both the love of honor and the love of power and his use of the words *pleonexia* and *arche*—typically used to describe the Athenians and the Athenian Empire—suggest that the *History* as a whole takes seriously the

[85] We shall see that Plato puts this instrumentalist understanding of power in the mouth of Callicles in the *Gorgias*.

proposition that the character and actions of the Athenians help transform the whole Greek world into Corcyra.[86]

Thucydides continues: greed (*pleonexia*) and ambition (*philotimia*) drive Corcyra's citizens to seek power at any cost. Twisted by these twin lusts, they readily jettison the traditional norms that formerly bound them into a coherent and stable political community. Now, *pleonexia*—graspingness—implies a hostility to preexisting norms, laws, or institutions that help cement distributions of wealth and power. Thucydides clarifies this understanding in the context of how to appropriately acquire wealth: "Political factions of this sort were formed not for the sake of profit according to the established customs, but for the sake of self-aggrandizement contrary to the existing rules" (3.82). By unleashing their pleonectic desires, the Corcyreans circumvent what are, for Thucydides, appropriate mechanisms (*nomoi*) for acquiring wealth. In doing so, the Corcyreans violate prior limits and boundaries and begin to tear apart the social and political fabric in ways that foreshadow the effects of Athenian *pleonexia* in the Pan-Hellenic community. Since established *nomoi* are shown to be the connective tissue holding Corcyra's political community together, their violation at the alter of *pleonexia* by political factions makes Corcyra cease to function as a *polis*. Unfortunately, the collapse of Corcyrean *nomoi* are symptoms of a more fundamental disease. Thucydides characterizes these deeper concerns in terms of deceit, faction, and mistrust.

During the Corcyrean revolution, powerful political factions took control and ruled with a view to only class interests. That is, the oligarchs ruled exclusively to benefit their class interests whereas the democrats ruled to benefit the *demos*. The fundamental unit of political analysis became class rather than kinship or a patriotic love

[86] Jonathan Price argues that Thucydides considered the Peloponnesian war itself as a *stasis* within the Greek people. See Jonathan J. Price, *Thucydides and Internal War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

of the *polis*. Most alarmingly, Thucydides describes how citizens identified with their party at the sometimes-fatal expense of their families. No longer was it possible to identify with the *polis* as a whole. Indeed, anything resembling a Corcyrean political community was destroyed by the revolution. As Thucydides describes it, class interests were quickly subsumed to self-interest (or, alternatively, class interests were only promoted to the extent that they dovetailed with self-interest) and no one considered the welfare of his neighbors. The Corcyreans embraced a more circumscribed view of their own individual interests than a healthy *polis* could ever allow. He illustrates this in his discussion of the overarching results of civil wars:

> Thus was every kind of wickedness afoot throughout all Greece by the occasion of civil wars. Simplicity, which is the chief cause of a generous spirit, was laughed down and disappeared. Citizens were sharply divided into opposing camps, and, without trust, their thoughts were in battle array. No speech was so powerful, no oath so terrible, as to overcome this mutual hostility. The more they reckoned up their chances, the less hope they had for a firm peace, and so they were all looking to avoid harm from each other, and were unable to rely on trust. For the most part, those with the weakest minds had the greatest success, since a sense of their own inferiority and the subtlety of their opponents put them into great fear that they would be overcome in debate or by schemes due to their enemies' intelligence. They therefore went immediately to work against them in action, while their more intelligent opponents, scornful and confident that they could foresee any attack, thought they had no need to take by force what might be gotten by wit. They were therefore unprotected, and so more easily killed. (3.83)

Notice the subtlety of Thucydides' analysis. The civil war divides the poor (democrats allied with Athens) from the rich (oligarchs allied with Sparta) into opposing camps. When this happens, both the democrats and the oligarchs are made worse. The democrats' sound-mindedness (*gnome*) is obscured by passion, whereas the oligarchs, though retaining sound judgment, lack the passion to take necessary action. For Thucydides, both passion and sound-mindedness are necessary ingredients for healthy men and healthy cities. Civil war separates the classes, detaching sound-mindedness

from those passionate enough to effectuate intelligent policy. Unsurprisingly, this creates on the one hand rash, ignorant, and passionate men and, on the other, men who are enervated yet reasonable (indeed, according to Thucydides, enervated *because* they are reasonable).[87]

The Corcyrean *stasis* brings to light the effects of particular basic human forces such as: the lust for power, greed, revenge, and the concomitant violence that follows in their wake. Trust naturally falls by the wayside, since individuals see each other adopting a policy of mutual exploitation in accord with their own narrow understanding of self-interest. And, indeed, this loss of trust (*pistis*) signals the demise of politics. At Corcyra, trust eroded to the point that individuals would trust each other only if they were partnering in crime. Oaths became meaningless since everyone would break them if it were personally beneficial. In short, "citizens had become divided into two hostile camps, and each side viewed the other with mistrust" (3.83). The trust between individuals that formerly bound Corcyra as a political community frayed due to the willingness on the part of individuals to employ any mechanism for acquiring advantage—even those that flew in the face of laws and customs that helped establish what properly belongs to others or the *polis*. Political leaders were most guilty of flouting pre-existing limits. They promoted reforms which they cynically claimed would benefit the city as a whole and promised to serve both the people and the aristocrats. Thucydides exposes their claims as unfounded propaganda designed to reserve political awards for the few who came out on top (3.82). Political leadership became nothing other than a vehicle for self-interest and served to generate further skepticism and collapse. For Thucydides, ambition, greed, and self-interest serve as catalysts of civic

[87] *The New York Times* columnist David Brooks makes a similar point about moderates in the American political system.

dissolution and lead to skepticism, the pursuit of narrow self-interest, and the perversion of politics.

With this in mind, let us turn to Thucydides' second elaboration—perhaps his summation—of the causal relationship:[88]

> Most of these atrocities, then, were committed first in Corcyra, including all the acts of revenge people take, when they have the opportunity, against rulers who have shown more arrogance than good sense, and all the actions some people choose unjustly to escape longstanding poverty. Most of these acted from a passionate desire for their neighbors' possessions, but there were also those who attacked the wealthy not for their own gain, but primarily out of zeal for equality, and they were the most carried away by their undisciplined anger to commit savage and pitiless attacks. Now that life had been thrown into confusion in the city, human nature—which is accustomed to violate justice and the laws—came to dominate law altogether, and showed itself with delight to be the slave of anger, the mater of justice, and the enemy of anyone superior. Without the destructive force of envy, you see, people would not value revenge over piety, or profits over justice. When they want revenge on others, people are determined first to destroy without a trace the laws that commonly govern such matters, though it is only because of these that anyone in trouble can hope to be saved, even though anyone might be in danger someday and stand in need of such laws. (3.84)

Thucydides begins by focusing our attention on poverty. Before the revolution, the pro-Spartan oligarchs are wealthy and powerful and the pro-Athenian democrats are poor and powerless. Once the conflict between Athens and Sparta commences and offers the respective parties the opportunity for wider support, civil strife breaks out and the poor unjustly seize what belongs to the rich. Thucydides says that what motivates them is either *pleonexia*—a passionate desire for more than their fair share of their neighbor's

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[88] Some commentators consider 3.84 to be spurious. However, I agree with Paul Woodruff that, if it is not authentic, it is at least "thoroughly Thucydidean in thought and style" and will treat it as such. Thucydides, *On Justice, Power, and Human Nature: The Essence of Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War*: 93. For the arguments against authenticity, see Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides*, 1. The most persuasive argument in favor of authenticity is Matthew R. Christ, "The Authenticity of Thucydides 3.84," *Transactions of the American Philological Association (1974-)* 119(1989). Robert Conner also offers a convincing defense of the passage. W. Robert Connor, *Thucydides* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 102.

possessions—or by a "zeal for equality" coupled with "undisciplined passion," both of which are brought to the surface by the oligarchs' arrogant behavior before the war. C.D.C. Reeve offers an explanation for why Thucydides considers it unjust for the poor to seize the possessions of the rich. As he puts it: "The answer must surely be that the underlying motives, *pleonexia* in one case, undisciplined passion in the other, lead the poor to go beyond what equality itself demands. They do not rest content with a fair redistribution of wealth, but take more than their fair share or inflict unjust or unfair retribution on the rich."[89] It is envy that helps account for the actions that spring from *pleonexia* or the "zeal for equality" and "undisciplined passion." What's more, the envy itself is created by the pre-*stasis* distribution of power and wealth. Leaving some parts of society in conditions of enduring poverty and powerlessness, subject to the arrogant whims of those in power with no opportunity to participate, Corcyra was a tinderbox waiting to ignite. Indeed, Thucydides hints that the pre-revolution distribution of power and wealth violated principles of justice, equality, and fairness available to those with good sense (or the pious). Reeve is again instructive: "No doubt, power and wealth naturally attract some envy, but unfairly or unjustly held or arrogantly used power and wealth attract something else. They attract righteous indignation—not so much envy at legitimate success, but indignation at arrogant, unfair, unjust success."[90]

A closer examination of this passage shows that Thucydides is not making a blanket condemnation of human nature but, rather, specific parts of it which are susceptible to being overcome by passion. For example, he highlights the almost causal relationship between the arrogant use of power and the desire for revenge. He notices as well the lamentable fact that *pleonexia* often overcomes justice and that the desire for

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[89] C.D.C. Reeve, "Thucydides on Human Nature," *Political Theory* 27, no. 4 (1999): 437.
[90] Ibid., 438.

equality typically stems from unfair distributions of power and wealth. We should not be surprised, in other words, that law and justice often fall in the face of the passionate desires. However, it is important to recognize that Thucydides does not go so far as to indict human nature as a whole; he restricts his view to particular aspects of our character and, even then, under specific conditions. For example, piety (*to hosion*) is the aspect of human nature that is overcome by passion. The primary meaning of *hosios* is "sanctioned by the law of God, opposed to *dikaios* (sanctioned by human law)."[91] Therefore, the effect of passion is to overcome the laws of Gods or nature (*phusis*)—as opposed to the laws of the city—which are grounded in sound judgment and good sense. But revenge serves to motivate people to attack anyone who exercises power arrogantly (instead of sensibly). In so doing, it causes people to undermine appeals to the laws that protect those who are powerless to defend themselves. Of course, these laws are not the typical *nomoi* of the city; *anyone* in jeopardy has recourse to them.

Appeals to these higher laws are later made explicit by the Melians in one of the most famous episodes in the *History*, the Melian Dialogue:

> Well, then, since you [Athenians] put your interest in place of justice, our [Melians'] view must be that it is in our interest not to subvert this rule that is good for all: that a plea of justice and fairness should do some good for a man who has fallen into danger, if he can win over his judges, even if he is not perfectly persuasive. And this rule concerns you no less than us: if you ever stumble, you might receive a terrible punishment and be an example to others. (5.90)

The Melians argue that it is actually in the interest of those in power to consider appeals to justice and fairness, even though the powerful have the ability to arrogantly

[91] Henry George Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), s.v., "hosios".

ignore them because, if they lose power, they may need recourse to these same appeals.[92] These appeals derive their authority not from any positive law, because there is no Pan-Hellenic governing body to make it. Rather, their authority is generated by virtue of reason, prudence, good sense or sound judgment (*sophrosune* and *gnome*). Whereas arrogantly exercising power will lead to acts of revenge and *stasis*, prudence contains within it the possibility of generating justness and fairness. This is why appeals to justice and fairness should be heard by the powerful—it is a common good of both the powerful and the powerless. To recapitulate, it is not simply positive law or convention that is at issue on Corcyra but, rather, an understanding of justice that is grounded in reason and sound judgment. And Thucydides hints that it is particularly important to attend to it in the face of human nature's tendency—not to say propensity—toward revenge when faced with the arrogant exercise of power and *pleonexia*, and toward reckless passion when confronted with longstanding poverty. A fuller examination of the Melian Dialogue helps bring these points to light.

In 416, during the Peace of Nicias, Athens decided to invade the island of Melos in order to compel it to become a tribute paying member of the Athenian Empire. Melos was originally a colony of Sparta and had attempted to remain neutral since the beginning of the Peloponnesian War in 431. However, neutrality became unsustainable in the long term. Indeed, in 426 Athenian troops commanded by Nicias attempted to take the island. While the 426 campaign ultimately failed (and Thucydides gives the impression that it was a fairly half-hearted effort), it may have inclined the Melians to embrace a more

[92] That Athens is more just than her power requires is precisely the argument that the Athenian Ambassadors give at the Congress at Sparta for the justness of Athenian empire in Book I of the *History*.

confrontational position toward the Athenians. This early success may even have encouraged them to think that they could resist the powerful Athenians.[93]

The Melian Dialogue comes at the end of Book V in the *History*, which focuses on the time period between the onset of the Peace of Nicias and the destruction of Melos. Most of Book V concerns the rise and fall of Argos and, reminiscent of Corcyra, pays special attention to, on the one hand, high-minded pledges and oaths and, on the other, calculated scheming and deceit. The way Thucydides presents the machinations surrounding the Argos episode strongly suggests that calculated self-interest dominates concerns for justice in relations between states. Thucydides never makes much of a case for Melos having any strategic significance to the Athenians. Melos is only mentioned on two other occasions in the *History*, both of which highlight Nicias' failed attempt to subdue the island.[94] Thucydides gives the impression that the second Athenian attempt on Melos was equally incidental. He introduces the episode by saying: "The next summer Alcibiades sailed to Argos…The Athenians also made an expedition against the island of Melos" (5.84). Since the siege lasted several months and reinforcements needed to be sent, it is highly likely that the matter was debated in the Athenian assembly—especially with respect to the extremely significant penalty of putting all the Melian men to death and enslaving the women and children.[95] Yet, Thucydides does not mention any debate, unlike the earlier case of Mytilene, where he details the discussion as a reflection of the significant threat the revolt posed for Athens.[96] But Thucydides draws our

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[93] There is some debate over whether Melos was in fact neutral as suggested by some statements in the Melian Dialogue. The Melians appear on the Athenian Tribute List for the year 425, hence the conjecture that Athens was perhaps collecting tribute and, therefore, not violating the neutrality of an independent city.
[94] See 3.91 and 3.94.
[95] See Xenophon, *Hellenica* 2.2.3 and 2.2.10 for an account of how the Athenians later regretted their treatment of the Melians.
[96] Perhaps this is because he reported the debate over the similar Mytilenean decree (which was repealed) and the motion to annihilate Scione.

attention to the importance of the Melian episode by presenting us with the only dialogue in the entire *History*. He further focuses our attention on *arguments* by removing strategic significance from the discussion. Whether or not the Athenians control Melos will not have a significant effect on the war's outcome.

Before beginning the siege—specifically, ravaging the Melian countryside in order to induce starvation and poverty—the Athenian generals send envoys to negotiate a Melian surrender. Thucydides tells us that the Melians refused to let the Athenians speak to "the common people," but instead asked them to address "the officials and a small group," implying that Melos is an oligarchy and that those in power fear that the envoys might find a sympathetic audience in the Melian population at large (5.85).[97] While agreeing to the Melian demand—even complimenting them on their cleverness—the Athenians propose a point-counterpoint type of debate as an alternative to long, uninterrupted speeches that might be persuasive to the majority.[98] As Patrick Coby observes, the "Athenians are honest even about the deceptiveness of rhetorical speech."[99] Furthermore, Thucydides uses the Athenian frankness at Melos to make a pedagogical point—specifically, a new way of thinking about the discrepancy between speech and action. Prior to the Melian Dialogue in the *History*, cities use arguments from history, honor, and justice *in addition to* advantage in order to persuade other cities, though Thucydides tends to show the overwhelming predominance of expediency in determining the choices cities make. Indeed, as we have seen, the first major episode in the war—

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[97] Andrewes notes that "*archai* in Greek would include the council, often the most powerful organ in an oligarchy, as well as magistrates in the more familiar sense; and *oligoi* will be the privileged voters." Arnold Wycombe Gomme, A. Andrewes, and K. J. Dover, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), IV, 159.

[98] See Plato's *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*.

[99] Patrick Coby, "Enlightened Self-Interest in the Peloponnesian War: Thucydidean Speakers on the Right of the Stronger and Inter-State Peace," *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique* 24, no. 1 (1991): 76.

between Corcyra and Corinth—showed that the Athenians allied with the Corcyreans not out of a consideration for justice, but because of the substantial naval resources that Corcyra would bring the empire (1.44). More infamously, the Spartans slaughtered the Plataeans because the Thebans "were useful" to them, in spite of the overwhelmingly moral character of that debate (3.68). By drawing our attention to the gap between actual and rhetorical motives, Thucydides encourages us to notice the distance between the rhetoric of the debates and what ultimately motivates cities' actions. The Melian Dialogue is the apotheosis of this approach: the Athenians explicitly reject what constitutes the appropriate language of political argument—they pull back the veneer of appeals to history, honor, and justice.[100]

Returning to the dialogue, the Athenians further encourage the Melians to interrupt them if they disapprove of something said (5.85).[101] We may wonder whether the Athenian Ambassadors' arguments at Melos bring the very institutions of Athenian democracy into question. That is, if set speeches are problematic with respect to truth, and decisions by the Athenian democracy are made by voting after a series of speeches, how credible are these democratic decisions?[102] The Melians seem to understand the Athenian suggestion as a typical Greek *agon* or competition between opposing parties with a panel of judges deciding the outcome. However, the Melians note that the

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[100] For a more thorough discussion of this point, see James V. Morrison, "Historical Lessons in the Melian Episode," *Transactions of the American Philological Association (1974-)* 130(2000).

[101] Of course, as James V. Morrison points out, this "has to cause some uneasiness for the reader, who is now forced to revisit the previous speeches within the *History* in an entirely new light. To what extent have the speeches from the first five books been deceptive?" Indeed, by criticizing set speeches "Thucydides has highlighted the choice of format for this discussion by raising the question as to whether the dialogue form is actually a better way to arrive at the truth." Ibid., 124.

[102] As Josiah Ober puts it, "Thucydides' implicit lesson is that democratic knowledge does not provide an adequate grounding for assessing the truth value of rhetorical discourse. And thus, badly—or at best indifferently—instructed by speech, the Athenian Assembly was likely eventually to fall into error and, as a result, to make bad policy." Josiah Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 78.

significant difference here is that the Athenians are to serve as both contestant and judge. The Melians, then, seem to be left with a Hobson's choice: if they are victorious in the rhetorical *agon* because of better or more just arguments, there will be war; if they lose the debate, they will become slaves or subjects in the Athenian Empire (5.86).

The Athenians admonish the Melians to set aside any "suspicions about the future" and encourage them to adopt as the debate's purpose "planning your city's survival on the basis of the present circumstances as you see them" (5.87). If they intend to consider "anything else," the Athenians say they are not interested in continuing the conversation—the preservation of Melos is the only salient item on the agenda. The Athenians are frank and unambiguous: both parties understand that the Athenians are threatening to raze an entire Greek *polis*. The Melians concede that it "is natural and understandable" for men in their position to "look in many directions as they speak and reflect" but agree it is true that their survival is at stake and that the discussion should follow the Athenian proposal (5.88).[103] The Athenians, who have already circumscribed the debate to include a single topic—Melian survival—introduce further restrictions. They claim that they will not further their argument by using "noble phrases to furnish a lengthy and unconvincing speech." (5.89). The Athenians offer that they will themselves forego two specific arguments: (1) that they have the right to their empire because they defeated the Persians and saved Greece, and (2) that their arrival on Melos is a response to an injustice or injury done to them by the Melians. The Athenians attempt to render justice outside the bounds of debate. Possibly thinking that their self-restriction gives them the warrant to place yet another restriction on the Melians, the Athenians ask the Melians to not attempt to persuade them with the claim that they should be left free due

[103] Though they hint that their agreement is simply a result of Athens' power, not Melian preference.

to their neutrality thus far during the war or "that you have done us no injustice" (5.89). Rather, the Athenians recommend that the focus should be on "what both parties really believe"—that in human affairs justice only applies under conditions of relative equality. When a superior power faces an inferior one "it gets as much as it can, and the weak acquiesce" (5.89).[104]

The tone adopted by the Athenians at Melos in Book V is markedly different from that taken by the Athenians at Sparta in Book I of the *History*. There, they attempt to justify their empire by noting their prominent role in the Persian Wars and their aftermath—thereby suggesting a moral justification for their rule. In the Melian Dialogue, the Athenian Ambassadors reject the relevance—even the mention—of justice and much more forthrightly assert the primacy of power and the irrelevance of moral values. Expediency becomes the only relevant question, and in this case expediency is defined in Athenian terms (and in terms of power): what best contributes to Athenian domination and what the Athenians consider to be expedient for the Melians—saving Melos from utter destruction.[105] Concern for justice is simply inapplicable, for "right is judged in the human sphere from an equal necessity" (5.89). Echoing the Corcyrean slaughter, the Athenians assert that justice is only relevant among equals in power. Power dictates the relevance of justice. When one power is sufficiently greater than another, discussion of justice is inapplicable and expediency, self-interest, and greed rule. The only law (*nomos*) is that of ruling when strong. According to the Athenian view of

[104] Paul Woodruff interprets the Athenians' point as follows: "justice is relevant when both sides must feel the force of law; but when one side is more powerful, it does not apply. The Athenians are not saying that might makes right; merely that might supersedes right between unequals." While I understand his point, I will argue that the Athenians are engaged in willful self-delusion and know that their view cuts the heart out of justice—specifically, that justice may require self-sacrifice. Nowhere is this more the case than is situations of unequal power. Thucydides, *On Justice, Power, and Human Nature: The Essence of Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War*: 103.

[105] Euphemus, in his Book VI speech to the Camarinaeans in Sicily, completely omits the argument from Athens' role in the Persian Wars (6.83.2).

international politics, then, equality is not a natural condition. Yet, interestingly, the Athenian regime itself depends internally on relative equality—and applied internally, the only way to establish equality is through positive law (*nomos*). Despite their claims about equality at Sparta, the Athenians are reluctant to admit it outside their own *polis*.[106]

In response to the Athenian assertion of justice's irrelevance at the hands of advantage, the Melians argue that it is equally advantageous to the Athenians to carefully consider the importance of the common good. Should the Athenians truly reject the significance of justice and equity, they will become a paradigm (*paradeigma*) to others for a very great punishment when they are eventually defeated (5.90).[107] The Melians thus understand justice as a common good shared by all cities (it is, of course, very much in their interest to do so) and arguments from justice—so long as they are "somewhat within the bounds of accuracy"—should in this sense "benefit" both parties (5.90). Therefore, they agree to the Athenian stipulation that considerations of advantage guide the discussion, but deny the Athenian claim that the Athenians and Melians are fundamentally (i.e., essentially) unequal. While the Melians may presently be weaker than the Athenians, someday the Athenians will be the weaker.[108] Nevertheless, there is a fundamental problem with the Melian claim that the Athenians are all too quick to recognize: if advantage governs how cities behave, it is uncertain whether whoever conquers the Athenians will make them a paradigm of punishment. The Athenians will only be punished if it is in their conqueror's interest to do so, and they doubt that their

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[106] See Thucydides, 1.77.

[107] According to Aristotle, a paradigm is one class of imitation, presenting things as they ought to be (*Poetics* 1460b). As we shall see, Socrates echoes the Melians' suggestion in the *Gorgias*, arguing that "It is fitting for everyone who is being punished—rightly punished by another—either to become better and thus be benefited or to *become a paradigm* for the others, so that the others, seeing what a person who is suffering suffers and becoming afraid may become better" (*Gorgias* 525b, italics mine).

[108] There is a remarkable similarity between the Melians' logic here and Hobbes' understanding of equality in *Leviathan*.

conqueror will care much about how they treated the Melians. And, as Thucydides and his readers know all too well, the Spartans do not seek revenge or punish the Athenians for their past actions. The Athenians note that the Spartans also rule over other cities (that is, the Melians' savior is no different from the Athenians) and repeat that it is to advantage themselves that they have come to Melos, and it is the possible salvation of the Melians that both parties should be concerned with. Notice that the Athenians and Melians agree that a common good exists—they simply understand it in fundamentally different ways. They both will benefit if the Melians surrender instead of fighting. The Athenians will subsume Melos into the empire without much effort and expense and the Melians will save themselves from annihilation.[109]

The Athenians reiterate their basic position, claiming that the preservation of Melos is to the advantage of both parties—they suggest that their interests coincide. In Chapter 92, the Melians seriously question the substance of the Athenian position. In what way is it *equally* advantageous for the Melians to be enslaved and for the Athenians to rule? The Athenian reply is relatively simple: by submitting to the Athenians, Melos will be saved. In doing so, Melos avoids complete annihilation and Athens profits by gaining future Melian tribute. As Thucydides presents it, the Melians seem to recognize the accuracy of the Athenian diagnosis. They do not even attempt to directly respond to the Athenians' unpleasant highlighting of their coincidence of interests. Instead, they put forth a new position in the hopes of resolving the issue—peace through neutrality. That is, the Melians raise the possibility of friendship and neutrality with the Athenians. They will not formally ally with either Athens or Sparta. The Athenians reject the Melians' offer outright and in so doing reveal their reformulated theory of power politics.

[109] Notice here that the Athenians adopt Diodotus' view of deterrence at 3.42-3.48.

Counterintuitively, for the Athenians, Melian friendship (here understood as neutrality, not as an alliance) is even more damaging to Athens than their enmity, because Athens' subjects will view Melian neutrality as an indication of Athenian weakness. By contrast, Melian hatred will simply show or reinforce the magnitude of Athenian power to her subjects (5.95).

The Melians counter that Athens' subjects have a fairly robust sense of fairness (fairness here serving as a placeholder for justice, despite or because of the fact that the Melians previously agreed to forego speaking of justice). According to the Melians, Athens' subjects will distinguish between the neutrality of cities unconnected with Athens and her colonies—especially her rebellious ones. Only the neutrality of the latter (theoretical, since Athens claims that none successfully resist) shows any weakness on the part of Athens, since these cases explicitly show that she has difficulty keeping her "colonies" or "rebels who were subdued" under control (5.96). For their part, the Melians consider it unreasonable to treat the two cases similarly and doubt that Athens' subjects would view her leaving an insignificant and unallied Greek city alone as a sign of weakness. The inference here is that Athens is either misrepresenting her allies' views or seriously misunderstands her allies. The Athenians reply that their subjects think that both unconnected cities and colonies could make similar cases for independence based on right, namely, that both kinds of cities would plead for their rights and argue that it is unjust that some survive and maintain their independence while others are enslaved. Yet, those very subjects also think that the (only) reason that some cities maintain their independence is due to their strength. Athens doesn't attack them out of fear.[110]

[110] This realpolitik view is similar to how much of the world understands the recent U.S. military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya and lack of intervention in North Korea, Iran, and Pakistan.

Therefore, from the Athenian perspective, Melian surrender will simultaneously enlarge and help secure the empire.

The Greek word for security (*asphales*) conveys the idea of steadfastness, especially of not being liable to move or fall.[111] The Athenians, then, understand the security of the empire to depend on its ability to remain firm or immobile. The perception of power becomes nearly as important—indeed, perhaps more important—than actual power, for if their enemies think Athens strong, they will not attempt to resist. This is independent of Athens' true strength. Security is a matter of façade and the façade of the Athenian Empire will be more formidable if Melos, one of the weakest islands in the Aegean, does not prevail over the "masters of the sea," as the Athenians put it (5.97).

The Melians parry this, again object to excluding considerations of justice from the debate, and proceed to put forth a new argument on the basis of Athenian interest. If Athens attacks Melos, other neutral cities will naturally fear that they will be the next target and, therefore, will join with the Spartans (5.98). Destroying Melos, then, would be a pyrrhic victory, ultimately *increasing* the number of Athenian enemies. The Athenians answer that the most immediate threat to Athens is not from the neutral states on the mainland, since they have relative liberty, but from independent islands like Melos and "those already exasperated by the empire's constraints" (5.99). These island city-states are the ones most likely to "indulge most fully in unreason and subject both themselves and us to foreseeable dangers" (5.99).

The Melians seize upon the reference to danger and invoke the inextricable link between confronting danger and the essential Greek virtue of courage (*andreia*). If the

[111] Liddell et al., "A Greek-English Lexicon," s.v. "asphales".

Athenians are willing to act courageously, that is, are prepared to take risks in order to preserve their empire (and similarly their subjects in order to escape it), then the Melians who are still free would be cowards if they do not do everything within their power to avoid enslavement. Notice that the Melians here break one of the ground rules of the dialogue: they introduce a moral argument. They intend to make certain that the Athenians understand the historical importance that the fear of shame and the respect for courage have in Melian (and Greek) culture. Indeed, in the two chapters where Herodotus mentions Melos, he tells us that it was one of the three islands in the Aegean that did not submit to the Persians when they invaded Greece.[112] The Melians even sent two of their very dated ships to fight alongside the Athenians and other Greek forces at Salamis.[113]

Here, however, the Athenians chide the Melians for what they take to be immature views. They highlight the important distinction between base cowardice and submitting in light of superior strength. They emphasize that no one will consider the Melians cowardly if they deliberate in a sensible manner (*sophronos*). The standard which the Melians use to evaluate their actions is the traditional or Homeric understanding of virtue (*arête*), where death is by far the more choice worthy outcome when compared with shame and defeat. Again we see the distinction or, perhaps more appropriately, the problem of justice and self-interest. On the one hand is the appeal to courage in contradistinction to cowardice, honor as opposed to shame—but the Athenians claim that these categories are intelligible only when both parties are of equal power. On the other hand is the appeal to prudence and self-preservation that should govern under conditions where one party is substantially more powerful than the other. According to

[112] Herodotus, *History*, 8.46.
[113] Herodotus, *History*, 8.48.

the Athenians at Melos, it is irrational and imprudent to apply the former categories in the circumstances confronting the Melians because "the contest is not an equal one about manly virtue" but about the safety of their city (5.101). Indeed, it seems that the Athenians consider the virtues themselves only applicable for those contending on an equal footing. When rough equality doesn't obtain, standards of virtue must give way to safety.

The Melians seem to accept once again the truth of the Athenian position about the power disparity. However, their hopeless position perhaps induces them to invoke the humbling concept of chance, fortune, or luck (*tuche*) in the hopes of reminding the Athenians that in warfare chance can help one party overcome a lack of strength. From the Melian point of view, the Athenians should be particularly sensitive to this argument because without it the Athenians would likely have been enslaved by the Xerxes in the Persian Wars. According to Herodotus, two powerful storms decimated the Persian fleet, reducing it to a more manageable (though still numerically superior) size prior to the battle of Salamis—and storms are unquestionably not part of Athenian agency.[114] But fortune, the Melians add, cannot intervene if they surrender. Luck would not be able to influence events unless they continue to resist. All hope would then be lost, whereas if the Melians remain active, there is always the hope (*elpis*) or chance of victory (or, as in the initial Athenian attempt, stalemate). It is difficult not to again suspect an ironical reference to Athenian attitudes during Xerxes' invasion. Indeed, if Athens had obeyed the warnings of the Delphic oracle and abandoned hope, there would have been no chance for fortune to help deliver the victory that helped establish the empire.[115]

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[114] Herodotus, *History*, 7.188-192, 8.13.
[115] Herodotus, *History*, 7.139-140.

Despite this rather obvious allusion to the Persian Wars, the Athenians feign ignorance and proceed instead to focus exclusively on the danger of hope. [116] As characterized by the Athenians, hope (*elpis*) is nothing more than wishful thinking during times of trouble. Thucydides here foreshadows the very different way in which the Athenians themselves will hope during the infamous send-off of the Sicilian Expedition that immediately follows the Melian Dialogue (6.31). Hope is dangerous for those who do not have sufficient resources to fall back upon after they have risked everything. According to the Athenians hope is "intrinsically extravagant," and there is a costly price to pay by heeding its call. The Athenians remind the Melians that they are weak, have only "a single turn of the scale" and caution them against indulging in such things as prophecies, oracles, and the like, when there are obvious and available human means to save them (5.103). The warning implies that, given the disparity of forces, the Melians have no evidence that justifies any hope of prevailing and therefore they should not find much solace in religion. They still have a human way to save themselves at their disposal that does not require their entrusting their fate to invisible hope—they should simply submit to Athenian rule. However, bringing religion into the debate only serves to increase Melian hope and, as a rhetorical strategy, backfires against the Athenians. For, as we often find in war, the Melians view themselves as the pious fighting against the unjust. Here they embrace the traditional understanding of justice (going back at least to Hesiod) that the gods favor the good and punish the bad.[117]

The Melians recognize the challenge of warring against the Athenian Empire and the special difficulty posed should fortune happen to favor the Athenians. The Melians

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[116] Perhaps the Athenians brush aside the allusion to the Persian Wars out of respect for their proposed rules of the debate. Recall that at 5.89, they explicitly promise to not mention that their rule is just due to their having destroyed the Persians.

[117] Hesiod, *Works and Days* 232-234.

consider the candor of this observation as evidence that they are not deluding themselves. However, they immediately follow this by asserting their confidence that they will not fall short with respect to fortune "from the god" (5.104). It is important to see that the Melians do not consider fortune to be some irrational force operating alongside human agency—sometimes favoring it, other times dashing its hopes and expectations. For them, fortune is not a random force. Rather, it is sent by the gods and the gods distribute it in light of moral principles. The reason the Melians give for expecting fortune to be on their side is that they are "righteous men who stand in opposition to unjust ones" (5.104). The Melians, then, live immersed in the archaic world-view with its deep religious conviction that the world is subject to cosmic justice. Nature is understood as just and, therefore, as a protector of the good. The Melians extend the values of the *polis* to nature as a whole. Their words do not betray any awareness of sophistic doubt or agnosticism that we will see in Plato's *Gorgias*, *Protagoras*, and *Republic* in the following chapters. They are innocent of the Greek Enlightenment and instead assume the standard theonomic or divine origin of law. Reversing Protagoras' famous formulation, for the Melians, gods, not men, are the measure of all things. However, the Melians hasten to add that their confidence is "not completely irrational" (5.104). They are not ignorant of the empirical fact that they lack power relative to the Athenians. To compensate for this, the Melians claim, "the Lacedaemonians and their allies will redress our deficiency in power" (5.104).[118] And they will be "compelled" (*ananke*) to do this from a sense of honor and kinship. The Melians hope that the Spartans will be moved to action by moral

[118] Commentators wonder whether this implies that the Melians were members of the Peloponnesian League or whether they had a separate alliance with Sparta. I suspect that Thucydides is suggesting that the Melians are being progressively seduced by hope, and are engaging more and more in wishful thinking. There is no formal treaty with Sparta; they simply hope that Sparta will come to their rescue.

reasons: fulfilling the duty of helping one's kinsmen, and avoiding the dishonor of failing to do so.

In the next chapter, which can be rightly seen as the culmination of the Melian Dialogue, the Athenians proceed to demolish the grounds for Melian confidence. With respect to the gods—and hence of favorable treatment by fortune—the Athenians say that they do not think their own behavior is in any way offensive. They are no less pious than the Melians. Athenian claims and actions do not fall outside of men's understandings about the gods, nor are they beyond men's attitudes in their dealings with each other. As the Athenians put it: "according to our understanding, divinity, it would seem, and mankind, as has always been obvious, are under an innate compulsion to rule wherever empowered" (5.105).[119] The Athenians, then, refuse to accept the Melian extension of the values of the *polis* to nature and the gods. Rather, they impose their behavior onto the gods, thereby inverting the traditional view of justice to support their actions. Nature becomes the unlimited acquisition of power and is in accordance with the gods. J.H. Finley's assessment of this passage very much hits the mark: "In attributing to the gods their own belief that superior power sanctions any conduct, [the Athenians] reveal the total disappearance of higher standards."[120]

The Athenians here express their central conviction about "the divine" and "the human," about the behavior of gods and men. Their thoughts about the former are based on common opinion or belief (*doxa*) or, as they said before, on men's ideas about the

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[119] Woodruff's translation is perhaps clearer: "Nature always compels gods (we believe) and men (we are certain) to rule over anyone they can control" (5.105). James Arieti and Roger Barrus provide the most literal rendering: "You see, with respect to the divine we think by opinion and with respect to the human [we think] clearly [that] *it* rules everything by this *convention*" (5.105, *italics mine*). They note that the antecedent to the italicized *it* is unclear in the Greek, but probably refers to both the human and the divine; the Greek word for the italicized *convention* is *nomos*. Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. James A. Arieti and Roger M. Barrus (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2007), 207.

[120] Finley, *Thucydides*: 211.

gods. To be sure, they do speak of a goodwill which can be expected with regard to the gods that matches the "from the gods" of the Melians, but most of their expressions are couched in such a way that doesn't require the *actual existence* of the gods. The Athenians limit themselves to what people think about the gods. They themselves make no claims about them. However, they do not place such restrictions on their statement about "men's attitudes toward themselves." The Athenians are well aware (as are Thucydides' readers) of how they actually behave.

What, then, are their specific thoughts about gods and men? Both are driven by an "innate compulsion" (*anankias*) that they supposedly cannot resist. Its agency is not a matter of convention or choice and it leads both gods and men to always dominate those who are weaker than they are. This behavior is not only natural, it is also a *nomos*—a custom, or convention—which the Athenians have neither established nor been the first to follow. It is an eternal *nomos* which has been handed down to them and which will continue to exist for all time. Not even the Melians can evade it: should they ever acquire the same power that Athens has, they will do the same thing, exercising control over whoever happens to be weaker than they. The conclusion that the Athenians draw from this general doctrine is that since the gods are thought to behave exactly as the Athenians do, they have nothing to fear from the gods. Notice that the Athenian view is put forth as a law of political behavior—the desire to dominate is simply a universal command or necessity. As Steven Forde puts it: "It may not have the immediate force of a natural principle like gravitation, but its operation is comparably irresistible."[121] And, if this is indeed true, then no city can be blamed for acting in accord with this impulse.

[121] Forde, "Varieties of Realism: Thucydides and Machiavelli," 376.

Unfortunately for the Melians, it is the powerful alone who determine whether and whom they wish to dominate.

The Athenians consider the Melians' confidence in receiving aid from the Spartans equally unrealistic. Here the Athenians become openly sarcastic: "we find a touching naivety yet do not envy your folly" (5.105). Indeed, the Melians' trust in the Spartans is equally a matter of opinion and faith—that is, of an untrustworthy kind of knowledge. The Spartans may follow standards of virtue (*arête*) or moral motivations in their dealings with other Spartans, but in their dealings with others, the Athenians caution that it is absolutely clear that the Spartans more than anyone else consider noble or honorable whatever is expedient, and justice as whatever is in their own best interest. In other words, the Spartans are the exemplars of pursuing their own advantage—they simply disguise their motives. Interestingly, the Melians do not reject this contention. They implicitly grant once more the truth of what the Athenians say, for their next move is to try to show that it is in the *best interests* of the Spartans to help them. If they do not come to their aid, the Spartans will lose the confidence of their friends and thus benefit their enemies (5.106). The Athenians answer with a general characterization of action according to its motivation. It is essential to the pursuit of self-interest to minimize risk, whereas action in pursuit of justice and honor involves danger. From this it follows that, since the Spartans are infamous for being risk-averse, this aspect of their self-interest will be foremost in their minds (5.107). The Melians advance two reasons why the risk should not be too great for the Spartans: (1) Melos is close to the Peloponnesus and (2) their common Dorian spirit makes the Melians "more reliable than others" (5.107).

The Athenians categorically reject both arguments. According to the Athenians, in taking up another's struggle, what provides security is not the goodwill of the party in need, but whether you have superior strength. Without superior strength, intervention

would be too risky. The Spartans know this better than anyone, for even when attacking their neighbors they prefer to have the company of their allies. Moreover, even though Melos is relatively close to the Peloponnesus, the Athenians control the sea (5.109). The Melians make a last desperate attempt to convince the Athenians (or perhaps simply themselves) that Spartan help will be forthcoming. It is much easier, they hold, to run a blockade than to intercept a ship in the vast Cretan sea. But, as if they suddenly realize how unrealistic this is, they add that the Spartans would invade Attica, something they have often done in the past, and find a way to subvert those allies of Athens that were not reached by Brasidas, the brilliant Spartan general whose swift campaigns in northern Greece led not only to the revolt of several cities, but to the exile of Thucydides himself. To mention Brasidas, the only individual whose name appears in the Melian Dialogue is, of course, only baiting the Athenians (5.110).

The Athenians brush aside the new suggestion, reminding the Melians that Athens has never lifted a siege because of danger elsewhere. They then proceed to withdraw from the negotiations, though not before delivering a lengthy speech in which the distinction between morality and self-interest reappears in the guise of two forms of dishonor. They mention, on the one hand, "shameful and manifest dangers," because their outcome is defeat, and "shame more shameful in folly than in misfortune," the shame involved in being too foolish to avoid destruction, which is worse than being doomed by involuntary misfortune. Thus, according to the Athenians, the decision to avoid shame—that is, the moral motivation of courage—is responsible for something more shameful: defeat and destruction. The Athenians withdraw after offering "reasonable terms," the Melians reiterate their trust in the gods and the Spartans, the Athenians accuse them of being unrealistic, and hostilities begin. The dialogue is over.

Unsurprisingly, what the Athenians warned the Melians of comes to pass. Even though the Melians score a brief victory with a surprise night assault, Athens sends reinforcements under Philocrates and the Melians surrender. The final sentences of Book V are among the most harrowing in the *History*. The Melians "surrendered to the Athenians to be dealt with as they wished. They [the Athenians] killed all the grown men they captured, enslaved the children and women, and settled the place themselves" (5.116).

Thucydides suggests in the Melian Dialogue that justice is not equal to the task of restraining power—everything comes down to relative strength. Justice is not rewarded and weakness merely waits to be punished, since cities will choose to rule with violent expediency. Justice is either too weak or is simply irrelevant to restrain the stronger powers. Had the Melians surrendered, they would sacrifice their freedom at the altar of existence. Their belief in the gods' justice led to the destruction of their *polis*. Thucydides seems to conclude that the Melians tried to reconcile what is necessarily separate: *nomos* and *phusis* rule in their respective realms. In spite of these reflections, the Melian Dialogue remains, as much in Thucydides, an unresolved antinomy. The Athenians are right in their warnings to the Melians and wrong in their theory of power, the Melians are wrong in expecting Spartan help and are perhaps right in their claim to be acting justly. But, on balance, his fellow Athenians stand tacitly condemned by Thucydides: they are blind to the true nature of power, they do not deliberate with intelligence (*gnome*), but under the spell of their passions, and they commit a monstrous crime which, according to Xenophon, weighted heavily on their conscience at the hour of

their total defeat.[122] At Melos and elsewhere, a failure in moderation is responsible for blindness in the face of the value of justice.

Indeed, let us not forget how the Corcyrean *stasis* ends (as do many commentators). The oligarchs finally surrendered on the condition that they be tried by the Athenians, rather than the Corcyreans. The Athenians demanded that the oligarchs accept temporary imprisonment on a nearby island, from which the oligarchs agreed not to escape. The Corcyrean democrats, afraid that the Athenians would pardon the oligarchs, convinced some of them to attempt an escape, ensuring that they would be discovered and, therefore, angering the Athenians. That is precisely what occurred. The Athenians accused the oligarchs of breaking the agreement, and turned them over to the Corcyreans. Thucydides shows his indignation at the immoderate way the democrats treat their fellow countrymen through his harrowing description of the incident:

> When the Corcyreans took over the prisoners they shut them up in a large building and later brought them out twenty at a time, bound them together, and made them go down a path lined with hoplites drawn up on both sides. They were beaten and stabbed by the troops in the lines, whenever any of them was spotted as someone's personal enemy. And to speed up the laggards, men with whips followed them down.
>
> They took about sixty men from the building, drove them down the path, and killed them, while those inside the building thought they were only being moved to another place. When someone told them, and they saw the truth, they cried out to the Athenians and asked them to kill them if they wanted, but said that they were no longer willing to leave the building, and that, as long as they had the power, they would not allow anyone to come in.
>
> The Corcyreans, however, had no intention of forcing their way in at the door; they climbed up on the roof of the building, tore off the roofing, and began throwing roof tiles and shooting arrows inside. The inmates defended themselves as well as they could, but most of them killed themselves either by stabbing their throats with arrows that had been shot at them or by strangling themselves with cords from beds that happened to be there or ropes they made from their own

[122] Xenophon, *Hellenica* 2.2.3, 2.210.

> clothes….At daybreak the Corcyreans threw them criss-cross on wagons and carted them out of the city. The women they had captured at the fort were made slaves…and at this point the civil war that had grown so large came to an end, at least as far as this war was concerned, since there was hardly anything left of one of the two sides. (4.47-4.48)

There is a remarkable similarity between the arguments of the Athenian Ambassadors at Melos and those made by Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*. In the next chapter, I will present what I take to be Plato's initial response to the view of the Athenian Ambassadors in the *Gorgias*.

Chapter 2: Plato on the Moral Foundation of Politics

The seriousness with which Plato takes the moral challenge underlying Athenian imperialism is reflected in the fact that his attempt to adequately respond to the problem gives rise to his second and third longest works. The *Gorgias* is the longest "Socratic" dialogue and the *Republic* is the second longest dialogue in the Platonic corpus, at the center of which lies an extensive discussion of the structure of reality and the way the soul has access to it. Plato's desire to sufficiently respond to the ideology of Athenian greed and aggression ultimately leads him to the relationship between goodness, truth, and being. To put this in the starkest possible terms: for Plato, the problem of power, violence, and greed—which Callicles (and Thrasymachus) represent—is, at root, also an epistemological, linguistic, and metaphysical problem.

The essence of the Melian Dialogue is the central challenge that Plato poses in the *Gorgias*, and his response is a radical critique of the deterministic "realism" put in the mouths of the Athenian Ambassadors by Thucydides. Plato doesn't mention the Melian Dialogue or indeed any specific episode of the Peloponnesian War by name—it would be unnecessary; his audience was all too familiar with its details. But Plato is none too subtle in the ways that he invokes the Peloponnesian War and the new Athenian morality. The very first word of the *Gorgias* is "battle" (*polemou*), and during the course of the dialogue Socrates attacks four of Athens most esteemed leaders: Themistocles, Cimon, Miltiades, and Pericles.[123] Each of these leaders played an instrumental role in the development of Athenian imperialism. Themistocles inaugurated Athenian naval

[123] Socrates attacks Themistocles on three separate occasions in the *Gorgias* (455e-456a, 503c-d, 515d-519a). Though Terence Irwin considers Socrates' attack "a gross over-simplification—typical of Socrates' political comments," for Plato, Themistocles was the embodiment (along with Pericles, Cimon, and Miltiades) of Athenian imperialism. Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Terence Irwin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 235.

supremacy by routing the Persian navy at the battle of Salamis. Cimon brought Athenian naval supremacy to fruition by crushing the Persians again at the battle of the Eurymedon River in 466. Miltiades led the Athenian army to victory over the Persians at the battle of Marathon and, to this day, Pericles stands as the paragon of Athenian wealth and culture. Indeed, Seth Benardete is probably correct in saying that: "No other Platonic dialogue is as saturated with allusions to events that span the Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.E.) as the *Gorgias*."[124]

The *Gorgias* is perhaps most famous for the speech given by Callicles where he ridicules Socrates for his political foolishness and naiveté. As R.E. Allen puts it: "The *Gorgias* is a meditation on the meaning of Socrates' trial and death."[125] While Socrates' impassioned defense of reason and morality is sometimes overlooked by commentators, the values that underline Callicles' position seem to be generally accepted as true by many in our postmodern world. For example, Callicles' views find fertile soil with radical leftist doctrine that eviscerates the concept of the soul, libertarians' embrace of free-market political and economic values, and conservative "realists" who tend to side with Callicles' censure of Socrates for using moral arguments to undermine longstanding tradition. Callicles' outburst can be understood as an attempt to take the argument between Socrates and Polus over whether shame, morality, and justice are natural or conventional to an extreme. And Callicles' account is farther-reaching than that of Thrasymachus in the Book I of the *Republic*.[126] Whether Callicles actually existed or not, his views clearly represent the undercurrent of hedonism that coursed through Athens at

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[124] Seth Benardete, *The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 7-8.
[125] Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato, Volume 1*, trans. Reginald E. Allen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 189.
[126] We will examine the *Republic* in Chapter Four.

the time. It also raises the question of whether Plato thought the regime of the *Republic* was necessary because of the failure of Socrates' strategy of changing individuals one at a time to refute the Athenian ideology of greed and power. Thirty years of war that culminated in the loss of her empire, over half of her adult male population, and countless other deaths due to plague, had perhaps inured the Athenian mind to the possibility of an underlying goodness in the world.

Before getting to Callicles' arguments, however, it is important to put the dialogue in context so that we might better understand what Plato wishes to draw our attention to. First, Plato makes it impossible for us to determine a dramatic date for the *Gorgias*. As commentators have frequently noted, there are references to: the "very recent" demise of Pericles (who died in 429); and the trials of the generals at Arginusae (which occurred in 406) are said to have occurred "last year" (474a). Furthermore, the only historical evidence for Gorgias actually visiting Athens dates it to 427—which is consistent with Pericles' death, but inconsistent with the discussion of the Macedonian tyrant Archelaus, who didn't take power until 413, as well as the references to Euripides' play, *Atiope*, from the last decade of the fifth century. As Benardete puts it: "Plato situates the *Gorgias* in wartime Athens but in such a way that we are enjoined to believe that the conversation never occurred. The *Gorgias* is of a time but not in time."[127]

However, we should not overlook the significance of Gorgias' visit to Athens in 427—the early years of the Peloponnesian War. Gorgias was chosen to represent his native Sicilian *polis* of Leontini, and sent to Athens to persuade the Athenians to help the Leontines in their conflict with Syracuse.[128] According to Diodorus Siculus:

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[127] Benardete, *The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy*: 7.

[128] On Gorgias' mission to Athens, see Richard Leo Enos, "Why Gorgias of Leontini Traveled to Athens: A Study of Recent Epigraphical Evidence," *Rhetoric Review* 11, no. 1 (1992). Paul Woodruff argues, however, that "we have no reason to think that his [Gorgias'] teaching affected the conduct of politics in

> The Leontines were attacked by the Syracusans. Being hard pressed in the war they dispatched ambassadors to Athens asking the Athenians to send them immediate aid and save their city from the perils threatening it. The leader of the embassy was Gorgias who in eloquence far surpassed all his contemporaries. He was the first man to devise rules of rhetoric and far excelled all other men in the instruction offered by the sophists….When Gorgias had arrived in Athens and been introduced to the people in assembly, he discoursed to them upon the subject of the alliance, and by the novelty of his speech he filled the Athenians, who are by nature clever and fond of dialectic, with wonder…he won the Athenians over to an alliance with the Leontines, and after having been admired in Athens for his rhetorical skill he made his return to Leontini. For some time past the Athenians had been covetous of Sicily because of the fertility of its land, and so at the moment, gladly accepting the proposals of Gorgias, they voted to send an allied force to the Leontines, offering as their excuse the need and request of their kinsmen, whereas in fact they were eager to get possession of the island.[129]

Gorgias successfully executed his assignment, the result of which marked the advent of Athenian involvement in Sicilian affairs that culminated in the ruinous Sicilian Expedition ten years later. Athenian meddling in Sicily ended up costing them 10,000 hoplites, 30,000 seasoned oarsman, and the majority of their fleet. As Thucydides tells it, the Sicilian Expedition drastically changed the course of Athenian history (though the fact that the empire didn't immediately fall shows its remarkable resilience). T.K. Seung concludes from this that "Socrates' ultimate opponent in the *Gorgias* is none of his three interlocutors, but the ethos of Athenian power politics or rather the moral principle that shaped the imperialism and expansionism of Athens."[130] I might put Seung's point slightly differently: Socrates' debate with Callicles that serves as the dialogue's showpiece is his attempt to graphically illustrate to Gorgias the eventual—perhaps necessary—consequences of his manipulative rhetoric and, therefore, his moral irresponsibility. The seed of the moral principle that shaped Athenian imperialism can

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Athens." See Paul Woodruff, "Socrates Among the Sophists," in *A Companion to Socrates*, ed. Sara Ahbel-Rappe and Rachana Kamtekar (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 20.

[129] Diodorus Siculus, *Diodorus Siculus: The Library of History*, trans. Charles Henry Oldfather (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), XII: 53-54.

[130] Seung, *Plato Rediscovered: Human Value and Social Order*: 5.

thus be found in Gorgias' teaching, and its flower and fruit in what Polus and Callicles do with it. As we shall see in the next chapter, if Plato shows us the impact of sophistry on the first generation in the *Protagoras*, the *Gorgias* shows how sophistry helps twist the minds and actions of the Athenians after being exposed to sophism and war.[131]

Let me briefly lay out why I think this is the case. To begin, the dialogue's title is *Gorgias*, not *Polus* or *Callicles*. I conclude from this that the purpose of the *Gorgias* is to highlight the relationship between sophistic rhetoric and politics—specifically, the effects of this rhetoric on the *polis*. The *Gorgias* draws our attention to the danger of demagoguery to an Athens that, as we saw in the last chapter, claims to transcend nature and the gods. Plato lays responsibility for this mess at Gorgias' doorstep. According to Socrates, Gorgias values success over truth, answers over questions, and pleasure over understanding. In the course of teaching how to use language as a means for unlimited acquisition, he helped erode Athenian (and, by extension, Greek) culture. His combative worldview seeps from speeches to deeds, infecting everything it touches, until the soul itself becomes corrupted. For Plato, the effects of Gorgias' teaching are both a cause and an effect of the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides' account of the Corcyrean bloodbath that followed the dissolution of language underscores the practical significance of this issue. In contrast to Gorgias and his progeny, Socrates takes a different and more respectful approach to language and the people who participate in it. Opportunistic rhetoric sickens a polity by tearing people apart and reinforcing a worldview where people are alienated from more ennobling ties that bind them together. For Socrates, shared dialogue is essential because it is the vehicle through which we are able to move toward understanding, truth, justice and, ultimately, a unifying common good.

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[131] It is important to recognize that I am speaking here of Plato's understanding of the sophists. For an account of why Plato is far from a neutral arbiter, see Woodruff, "Socrates Among the Sophists."

Before moving to the text, it is instructive to examine what information we have about the historical Gorgias, since it is likely that Plato would assume his readers would use this information to inform their readings of the dialogue. Unlike many of the sophists, we have several good sources other than Plato himself. With respect to metaphysics, the only information we have is Gorgias' own *On Not Being*. In this fragment, Gorgias seems to be arguing against the Parmenidean/Eleatic thesis of the unchanging oneness of being. Gorgias puts forth three propositions against the oneness thesis that run something like this. For anything we might mention: (1) it is nothing, (2) even if it were something, it is unknowable, and (3) even if it were knowable, it couldn't be made evident to others (DK 3).[132] Gorgias' argument seems contradictory (or at least convoluted)—perhaps intentionally. Paul Woodruff observes that Gorgias' thesis:

> is simply negative, so we cannot be sure what, if anything, Gorgias would have put in place of the views he refutes. It seems most likely that he had no philosophical theory to propose at all—no alternative account of being, knowledge, or meaning—just the practice itself of what he taught, of influencing human affairs through the effective use of words.[133]

Gorgias' conclusion appears to be that, in the absence, incomprehensibility, or indescribability of things, the world is constructed (only or primarily) through persuasive speech. This understanding of Gorgias' position is supported by his assertion that "a woman should be known to many by reputation, not by appearance" (DK 22). It appears that Gorgias understands being or reality in a similar way to women. Gorgias' fundamentally negative teaching is more clearly illustrated in his *Encomium of Helen*,[134] where he defends Helen against the traditional charge that she triggered the Trojan War

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[132] All fragments attributed to Gorgias are cited by Diels-Kranz number and are from *Early Greek Political Thought from Homer to the Sophists*, trans. and ed. by Michael Gagarin and Paul Woodruff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
[133] Paul Woodruff, "Rhetoric and Relativism: Protagoras and Gorgias," in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, ed. A. A. Long (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 306.
[134] DK 82 BII, hereafter *Helen*.

through her adultery. His stated aim in this speech is to display his ability to speak persuasively on any side of any subject, "and for my [Gorgias'] amusement" (*Helen* 11). Gorgias argues that Helen is blameless in causing the Trojan War because her journey to Troy was a result of either: (1) the gods' planning, (2) physical force, (3) the persuasive power of speech, or (4) the intoxicating power of love (*Helen* 6).

In his discussion of the powers that render Helen blameless, Gorgias states: "a human's anticipation cannot restrain a god's inclination" (*Helen* 6). He continues, foreshadowing Callicles, "for by nature the stronger is not restrained by the weaker but the weaker is ruled and led by the stronger: the stronger leads, the weaker follows" (*Helen* 6). Persuasive speech is, for Gorgias, an equally effective influence on human action: "if speech (*logos)* persuaded and deluded her mind, even against this it is not hard to defend her or free her from blame, as follows: speech is a powerful master and achieves the most divine feats with the smallest and least evident body. It can stop fear, relieve pain, create joy, and increase pity" (*Helen* 8). Gorgias ties the power of speech to the uncertainty of human knowledge: "For if all men on all subjects had memory of the past, <understanding> of the present and foresight into the future, speech would not be the same [kind of power] as it is now" (*Helen* 11). Under conditions of ignorance and fear, persuasion overcomes thought since "persuasion…has the same power, but not the same form as compulsion (*ananke)*" (*Helen* 12). Gorgias concludes that "persuasion, when added to speech, molds the mind as it wishes" (*Helen* 13). According to him:

> The power of speech has the same effect on the disposition of the soul as the disposition of drugs on the nature of bodies. Just as different drugs draw forth different humors from the body—some putting a stop to disease, others to life—so too with words: some cause pain, others joy, some strike fear, some stir the audience to boldness, some benumb and bewitch the soul with evil persuasion (*Helen* 14).

This is why Gorgias compares the art of persuasion, which "molds the mind as it wishes," to the art of astronomy, which "make[s] incredible, invisible matters apparent to the eyes of opinion" (*Helen* 13). This making of "invisible matters apparent" applies equally to the "opinions" of celestial motion as it does to shaping opinions regarding the power and decisions of a polity. Gorgias reminds us that persuasion may be salutary or necessary in polities, since the minds of men when confronted with fear (as in the state of nature first articulated by the sophists) are debilitated by the shock of events: "Some, indeed, who have seen fearful things, have lost their present purpose in the present moment, so thoroughly does fear extinguish and expel thought; and many have fallen into useless labors, terrible diseases, and incurable madness, so thoroughly does sight engrave on the mind images of things that are seen" (*Helen* 17). Here, Gorgias presents persuasive speech as absolutely necessary during times of war and hardship. Persuasive speech can reinterpret these traumatic memories and "tell a different story"—generating more beneficial conclusions, interpretations, and understandings.

With this understanding of the historical Gorgias in mind, we can examine the dialogue to see Plato's initial response to the normative crisis reflected in the position of the Athenian Ambassadors at Melos. Let us begin with some textual similarities. Gorgias claims that his art of rhetoric is the greatest good because it brings to the possessor "freedom for humankind itself and at the same time it is for each person the source of rule over others in one's own city" (452d). This description is remarkably similar (perhaps edited) to a line from Thucydides describing the intoxicating effects of hope, desire and fortune that generate imprudent and hubristic actions.[135] Thucydides puts these words in the mouth of the Athenian Diodotus during his famous debate with

[135] My point here is not to emphasize a specific textual allusion; rather, it is that Gorgias' thesis has become widespread.

the demagogue Cleon—introduced by Thucydides as the "most violent" of the Athenians—over the fate of the Mytileneans, which occurred at approximately the same time as Gorgias' visit to Athens. But whereas Diodotus speaks of the desire of "freedom or rule over others" as "men irrationally [having]…the *impression* of being greater,"[136] Plato presents Gorgias as actually believing that his art can create "freedom for human beings and rule in one's own city." At this point, Gorgias fails to see (as Diodotus hints), that self-mastery—temperately ruling over oneself—as opposed to the power to rule others, is the greatest human action.

However, it is important to note that Gorgias is not advocating demagoguery. He rejects the notion that rhetoric supports imperial orders or ventures. He views these actions as relying on (silent) violence rather than persuasion (*peitho*)—a word that, as Seth Benardete points out, "Gorgias uses nineteen times but, like the dog that didn't bark in the night, is utilized by neither Polus nor Callicles."[137] For Gorgias, persuasive speech is properly used to make oneself influential within the *polis*, but he recognizes the integrity of the *polis* as a natural limit to speech (and deed). The art of rhetoric and its product must always serve the *polis*. This attitude is reflected in Gorgias' mission to Athens, which he undertook to support the interests of his own *polis*. As Roslyn Weiss observes, "Gorgias is not like his successors in the argument…he disapproves of injustice…it would appear that he aspires neither to political office, nor to committing atrocities against others, nor to the unlimited indulgence of appetite."[138] Yet, as his *On Not Being* and the *Encomium* make clear, Gorgias' denial that anything exists ends up

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[136] Thucydides, 3.45, italics mine.
[137] Benardete, *The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy*: 6.
[138] Roslyn Weiss, *The Socratic Paradox and its Enemies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 70.

freeing humanity to use persuasive speech to generate happiness because there are no metaphysical or normative grounds for belief.

While Gorgias himself may strive to practice his art within the limits set by the *polis*, "ruling over others" appears to be a necessary condition for ensuring individual freedom—at least from the perspective of the consequences of one's actions. As Gorgias puts it, the art of rhetoric (for him, the art of persuasion) makes it possible for a practitioner to sway judges, councils, assemblymen, and "any other political gathering that might take place" (452e). He argues that the other professionals put forward as possible bringers of the greatest good (doctors, physical trainers, financial experts) would be the "slave" to whomever has the power to persuade the professionals and the masses to follow (452e). And Gorgias further reveals that the persuasive power of rhetoric (through politicians like Themistocles and Pericles) is what brought Athens' long walls, dockyards, and the Piraeus itself into being (455d-e). If Gorgias was able to convince the Athenians to send their navy to Sicily in 427, this would be a most effective way for Plato to silently indicate rhetoric's power.

What is implicit with Gorgias is made explicit by Polus who describes the life of the tyrant as best possible life, and who associates democratic leaders with the notorious tyrant Archelaus who, despite having no right to the throne of Macedonia, ascended to the throne after murdering his uncle, cousin, and seven-year-old step-brother through deceit (470d-473e, 479a-e).[139] Thucydides' brief account of Archelaus fails to mention his ascent to power, describing only the benefits of his rule: "he [Archelaus] built those [strong fortresses] that there are now in the country, made straight roads, and in other ways mustered resources for war with greater strength in horses, weapons, and general

[139] This story was apparently infamous in antiquity but modern scholars have begun to question it. For a detailed account of the evidence on Archelaus' life, see Eugene Borza, *In the Shadow of Olympus: the Emergence of Macedon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

preparation than all the eight kings who had come before him" (2.100). Archelaus helped save Athens after the disaster at Sicily by placing Macedonia's timber and pitch at her disposal to rebuild the fleet. In recognition for his help, the Athenians passed a decree praising Archelaus for his assistance and honoring him (and his children) with the status *Proxenos* and *Euergetes* of the people. He became a patron for Athenian artists, poets, and sophists. Euripides became a client of his and wrote an *Archelaus*, of which we know little today. Thucydides may have visited Archelaus, but Aristotle reports that Socrates refused his invitation.[140] Nevertheless, his reputation in Athens seems to have been poor. As Eugene Borza explains:

> there was also a genuine underlying disgust at what Archelaus seemed to represent…Whether Archelaus knew of his evil reputation among some Athenians, or even cared about it, is a matter best left to speculation. But it is clear—his notoriety notwithstanding—that Archelaus was able to create a veneer of Greek culture by purchasing the services of some notable Athenians.[141]

Interestingly, Archelaus was assassinated in 399, the same year Socrates was put to death. Because of this, I agree with E. R. Dodds that Plato's use of Archelaus is probably not coincidental.[142] At the time of Plato's writing, Macedonia's star was ascending and would bring the entire Greek world under its orbit within ten years following Plato's death. Socrates and Archelaus serve to embody the just and unjust life. Yet, Gorgias' student Polus is so enamored with Archelaus' injustice that he neglects to mention any other aspect of his rule.[143] When Polus asks Socrates if he thinks Archelaus "happy or miserable," Socrates reminds us of his declined invitation: "I don't know,

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[140] See Aristotle's *Rhetoric* 1398a.24.

[141] Borza, *In the Shadow of Olympus: the Emergence of Macedon*: 176.

[142] Plato, *Gorgias: A Revised Text with Notes and Commentary*, ed. E. R. Dodds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 241.

[143] See Devin Stauffer, *The Unity of Plato's Gorgias: Rhetoric, Justice, and the Philosophic Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 61. Unlike the Melians, perhaps the Athenians overlooked any moral quims in the face of necessity.

Polus, I haven't met the man yet" (470d). Socrates expresses surprise that Polus thinks the example of Archelaus reinforces rather than refutes his opinion that the life of injustice is beneficial to its practitioner. Polus believes that his opinion about preferring the unjust life is completely self-evident and needs no further support. Indeed, he attributes Socrates' claim to "disagree with every single thing" he has said to old-fashioned recalcitrance: "You're just unwilling to admit it. You really do think it's the way I say it is" (471e). The two are at an impasse, and both argue from assertion: for Polus, conventional opinion about Archelaus' enviable power needs no proof, while Socrates responds that Polus' "oratorical style…'refutation' is worthless, as far as truth is concerned" (471e-472a). The rhetoric of the Athenian law courts—where "reputable" witnesses are produced to undermine the truth fail to impress Socrates, though he concedes that "nearly every Athenian and alien" will take Polus' side (472a). Still Socrates, though "only one person," will not agree: "You don't compel me; instead you produce many false witnesses against me and try to banish me from my property, the truth" (472b).

This is an often overlooked but, in my view, crucial point in the dialogue. To someone like Polus, the way Socrates understands and privileges personal integrity is perplexing. If, as Socrates says, nearly every Athenian and alien—that is, most of Greece—will think of his conduct as baffling or foolish, they therefore fail to understand or take seriously the value or integrity of the human soul. Socrates' refusal to submit to the pressures exerted by both his body (e.g., his refusal to wear shoes) and the demos (e.g., his behavior during the Arginusae trial) suggest that he is ruled by forces other than the body or convention. This is both a hopeful message as well as an acknowledgement of a high degree of difficulty: even in a world where words lose their meaning and the will to power dominates, Socrates shows us the possibility of finding in ourselves the

ability to resist what Thucydides calls the coercive force of *ananke* (and, therefore, that it not a true *ananke*).

Returning to the dialogue, Socrates insists that they will have accomplished nothing unless one of them, either Polus or himself, gets the agreement of the other on the relationship between justice and happiness (472c-e). And we can now see why the methodological question of how the issue will be settled is of such significance. Whether the answer to the question will be determined by reference to the power of opinion or to reason and dialectic is nothing other than the question of what principle should rule the individual person. For Socrates, it is essential that individual souls can withstand the external pressures brought to bear on the soul by bodily desires and the coercive power of public opinion. As we've seen, the examples of Corcyra and Melos demonstrate the necessity of moderation and self-rule for peace and human flourishing. Polus asserts that the pleasures of a life such as Archelaus' should generate feelings of envy in any sane person. This, of course, implies that reason is the instrument or handmaiden to passion.[144] Socrates, however, is equally convinced that happiness is the flourishing of personal integrity, and is reflected in one's ability to resist unhealthy desires.

After Socrates claims that even though an unjust man is miserable, he is made more so by not being punished for his injustices, Polus laughs, asserting that Socrates has already been refuted since he is "saying things the likes of which no human being would maintain" and invites him to "ask any one of these people [here]" (473e). Socrates shorts-circuits Polus' "poll the audience" lifeline, returning to his previous distinction between rational argument and popular appeals. Socrates admits that he doesn't know how to call for a vote of the people. He is not so subtly referring here to the scandalous

[144] Polus anticipates here Hume's instrumentalist view that reason alone is merely "the slave of the passions." See Book 3 of the *Treatise on Human Nature*.

trial of the victorious Athenian generals at Arginusae when demagoguery trumped the law (since they were tried *en masse* rather than individually) as well as Athenian interest by executing six of their best remaining generals (and discouraging any others from wanting to serve). During the trial, Socrates courageously but unsuccessfully tried to stop the proceedings when he was the presiding officer over the Athenian Council.[145] Socrates gently reminds Polus (and those present) of this appalling example to make absolutely clear to Polus that, for Socrates, the well-reasoned thinking of a single individual is more valuable than an assembly of senseless sentiment.

Socrates now expands his original claim, asserting that Polus and "everybody else" believes that doing injustice is worse than suffering it, and that avoiding a just punishment is worse than accepting it (474b). Socrates again turns our attention back to the example of the tyrant Archelaus. Socrates suggests to Polus that anyone like Archelaus, who "although he commits the most serious crimes and uses methods that are most unjust, succeeds in avoiding being lectured and disciplined and paying his due," has the worst life of all, alongside "other tyrants, orators, and potentates" (479a). Socrates believes it is ridiculous for these men to fear justice, as it is the cure for their disease. This fear is as irrational as someone seriously ill avoiding medical treatment simply because it is painful. Their fear of being cured and their ignorance of its benefit is why these men "go to any length to avoid paying what is due" (479c). Instead they try to shape their worlds to mesh with their deluded understanding of their own good by finding themselves "funds and friends, and ways to speak as persuasively as possible" (479c). Therefore, for Socrates, though doing injustice is worse than suffering it, refusing the cure for injustice is worst of all. Though Socrates doesn't explicitly say so, the reason

[145] For an account of the Arginusae incident, see Donald Kagan, *The Peloponnesian War* (New York: Viking, 2003), 461-66.

this may be so is because the skillful practitioner of injustice himself becomes trapped in his own deluded web of betrayal and deceit. If we agree with Aristotle that man is a political animal, then human flourishing or happiness (*eudaimonia*) necessarily occurs in a setting that requires individuals to interact with others in the world through speeches and deeds. As Socrates has shown, this is precisely what an unjust life cannot permit, because it *cannot share*—rather, the freedom and power over others it requires demand that it turn all its energy toward making itself the center of things. In doing this, it seeks to twist the perceptions of others through political power and rhetoric to think its disease and corruption are, in fact, the nature of things.

As it turns out, though, it is not simply inter-personal communication that generates happiness—intra-personal communication also plays an essential role. That is, for Socrates, self-rule is more important than Gorgias' *summum bonum*—the pursuit of "freedom for humankind itself and…the source of rule over others in one's own city" (452d). Gorgias fails to see the double meaning of his own words; they apply equally to one's *polis* and one's soul. Socrates previously tried to direct Polus to focus on self-rule when he referred to his sole concern of calling a vote from one person only—himself or his interlocutor. The full import of this insight is not immediately obvious, but without it the life devoted to power and greed, exemplified in the murderous events of the Peloponnesian War, will be impossible to overcome. Indeed, with the backdrop of bloodshed and chaos that reigned during and after the Peloponnesian War, we can see that Plato reverses the dramatic trajectory of the *Gorgias* to suggest that the seeds of this disaster were sown by teachers and practitioners of demagogic rhetoric a generation or two earlier. Thucydides reports that Pericles' foresight was accurate: Athens was invulnerable as long as she stayed within her long walls, took care of her navy, and did

not attempt to expand the empire.[146] Yet, his advice was not taken as ambitious parties like Alcibiades pursued private ambition, power, and glory and used the tools of demagogic rhetoric to paint the rosiest pictures of future prospects for victory to the ignorant and greedy *demos*. Unsurprisingly, the Athenians encountered vastly tougher conditions after they were seduced—by their own rhetoric and greed—to leave the safety of the long walls. Military defeats that can and should be expected (once optimistic plans run headlong into the harsh light of reality) end up generating anger and righteous indignation on the part of the public. Consumed by anger, and ignorant of the honesty and self-rule required to see the true cause of their condition, men rip each other apart as on Corcyra. Socrates teaches that when we indulge or corrupt others (whether they are friends or enemies), we only damage ourselves by polluting the social environment we hold in common. Only men like Archelaus are myopic enough to believe they can create such an anti-*Kallipolis* for themselves.

Furthermore, Socrates argues that we will remain ignorant about what is truly just so long as we look to the *polis*, rather than the soul, as the source of virtue. This is because it is the individual soul which has the capacity to perceive justice and injustice. A collective or shared experience of injustice cannot by itself substitute for this. For Socrates, a regime governed by virtue can only be created in the individual soul—it can never be imposed on any larger unit. This is why Socrates argues that it is impossible for rhetoric to make men just. Socrates uses speech and deed to show that moral improvement arises by exposing the false beliefs and desires that send human beings awry. If this is an effective way of combating injustice, we should be highly critical of the way in which Athens acquired her empire. By requiring tribute from her allies as a

[146] Thucydides, 2.65.

means of waging wars against their common enemy (Persia), Athens encouraged the gullible *demos* that fighting injustice through (external) military action is more beneficial than establishing justice in one's own *polis* and one's own soul (internal). The violence and greed that came with post-Persian War Athenian imperialism grew like a virus that ultimately infected everyone. And if Socrates is correct, anything that makes a man's enemies worse will necessarily have an unhealthy effect on his own polity and his own soul. A *polis* becomes corrupted when its citizens believe that they become more just themselves by fighting injustice abroad, rather than pursuing their own private virtue.[147]

T. K. Seung suggests an anthropological explanation for this phenomenon.[148] He argues that in primitive societies, the love of kin or the extended family is the basis for social cohesion. This kinship-based love was *philia*, and, in such societies, friends were treated interchangeably with relatives, as they held the same importance for social stability. All those who belonged to the same kin were friends, while those who did not were considered strangers or enemies. The distinction between a friend (*philos*) and a stranger (*xenos*) became critical for tribal communities. The oldest civic virtue in the ancient Greek world was *aidos* (mutual respect) and is tightly linked with *philos*. The virtue of *aidos* necessitated both the respect for each other's rights, but also prescribed a duty to defend the other members of the tribe if outsiders attacked them.[149] As Seung puts it: "*Aidos* was the virtue of caring for the *philos* against the *xenos*; conversely, friends owed the duty of mutual care and respect to one another."[150]

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[147] One possible way of squaring this circle might be for Athens to relinquish its self-interest and mastery by force and offering leadership as opposed to tyranny. Were this the case, we might imagine an Atheninan led Greek alliance governed by a sense of mutual purpose and respect.
[148] Seung, *Plato Rediscovered: Human Value and Social Order*: 40-44.
[149] Emile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, trans. Elizabeth Plamer (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1973), 277.
[150] Seung, *Plato Rediscovered: Human Value and Social Order*: 41-42.

Though the love of kinship was a natural basis for tribal states, it began to brake down when members of different tribes came into contact with each other through communication and transportation. The love of kinship was unable to manage the difficult interactions between disparate tribal communities. The Homeric world attempted to solve this problem by extending the expectation of care of the *philos* to the *xenos*. For example, the host had the duty of treating his guests like friends, even though he was a stranger. The most infamous violation of this guest-friend relationship was Paris' abduction of Helen, while he was a guest of Helen's husband Menelaus.[151] When the extension of *philia* failed in the relation of tribal states, war ensued, and this war ended up spawning power politics.[152] The politics of power becomes the rule in a world of strangers and begins where the bonds of friendship and kinship end. Historically, the rise of power politics is coincident with the increase in the size of ancient Greek *polis*. As they became too big to be held together by bonds of friendship and kin, cities began to include too many people, who were, by the old standard of friendship, merely strangers. Hence the new ideal of power and *pleonexia* began to replace the old ideal of brotherly love and mutual care, and Callicles personifies this new ideal.

Returning to the *Gorgias*, Callicles exemplifies the self-indulgence of the new generation by bursting onto the scene in a manner akin to Thrasymachus' famous entrance in the *Republic*. As Eric Voeglin notes, "the battle has now reached the real enemy, the public representative of the corrupt order."[153] While Gorgias appeared to be merely absorbed in the technical aspects of the art of rhetoric, and Polus took this one

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[151] See Chapter One for a discussion of how Gorgias rationalized this violation.
[152] Perhaps the most famous support of the *xenos* relationship in Homer occurs in the *Odyssey*. When Odysseus washes ashore, the Phaeacians treat him to a banquet and help equip him for his journey home.
[153] Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, 5 vols., vol. 3 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), 28.

step further, emphasizing the link between rhetoric and political power, Callicles is far more of a hedonist. Indeed, Callicles' name ("famed for *visible* excellence") may itself support the idea that he stands for the overheated desire and corruption of imperial Athens. The character Callicles has long puzzled commentators. Since nearly all of Plato's *dramatis personae* were real people, some, like Dodds, believe Callicles to have been an actual person.[154] While it is undoubtedly true that Plato rarely invents his characters, he *does* invent them from time to time—take, for example, Diotima in the *Symposium*. Other scholars argue that Callicles is Plato's mouthpiece for Critias, one of the leaders of the Thirty that staged a coup against the democratic government of Athens and who was said to have personally plotted some of its most reprehensible actions—murders, confiscations, banishments, and the mass slaughter of the citizens of Eleusis.[155] Following Athens' defeat in the Peloponnesian War, Critias was perhaps the dominant person in Athens and used his power to execute his rivals and seize their wealth. Yet, his tyranny was relatively short-lived (though too long for his victims), and he was killed by Thrasybulus less than a year after taking power. Callicles' views are quite similar to those of Critias, and it is noteworthy that Critias authored a play entitled *Rhadamanthys* given the large role Rhadamanthys plays in Socrates' closing myth. Plato is perhaps inviting us to make this identification. Those who consider Callicles a stand-in for Critias note that Critias' actions and end may, for Plato, indicate to us that Calliclean doctrine is repugnant to civilized life as well as being effective only in the very short-term.[156]

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[154] Plato, *Gorgias: A Revised Text with Notes and Commentary*: 12. Dodds argues that Plato does not introduce fictional characters.

[155] See Xenophon, *Hellenica* 2.3-4 and Debra Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and other Socratics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), 108-11.

[156] In the *Seventh Letter*, Plato indicates that the Critias affair was influential in turning him away from a life of politics.

Callicles begins by accusing Socrates of demagoguery—specifically, exploiting the difference between nature (*phusis*) and convention (*nomos*), while pretending to seek the truth. According to Callicles, nature and convention are almost always in opposition, and he proceeds to describe a state of nature opposed to convention. In doing so, Callicles begins (or at least participates in) the long tradition in political philosophy of appealing to natural values (often arrived at through thought-experiments about the "state of nature") to generate normative standards.[157] Callicles tills the soil here by arguing that only a "slave," for whom death is preferable to life, naturally suffers injustice, since he is "abused and can't protect himself or anyone else he cares about"—i.e., "real men" don't suffer injustice by nature (483a-b). He further claims that it is these "slaves"—"the weak and the many"—who create human laws and norms out of the fear that they cannot compete with the more powerful under the laws of nature. So they proceed to establish laws that institutionally "assign praise and blame within themselves and their own advantage in mind" (483c). By doing this, they attempt to sideline those who are naturally more powerful in order to artificially create a condition of equality among men by saying "that getting more than one's share is 'shameful' and 'unjust'" and declaring it unlawful (483c).

Callicles' argument here is blasphemously anti-democratic. Whereas Socrates criticized the art of rhetoric for flattering public opinion and corrupting it against its true best interests, he did not argue against *nomos* itself—only that the requirement of any true *nomos* is governing with the common good or health of the *polis* in mind. Callicles, on the other hand, rejects all notions of equality and justice based on *nomos* (though, as we shall see, it gets more complicated for him later when he characterizes the law of

[157] Callicles reverses Greek naturalist approaches to normative standards. Instead of than using nature to determine what is, and then generate normative standards to avoid or mitigate the bad effects that sometimes accompany nature, Callicles identifies what is with what ought to be.

nature as a *nomos*). For him, nature itself reveals that it is just for the better to have more than the worse and the stronger to have more than the weaker. To illustrate this natural right, Callicles uses two examples from the great kings of Persia: Xerxes and Darius—though he says there are "countless other such examples" (483e). Yet, as some commentators point out, these examples are puzzling because, of the "countless" examples he could have chosen, Callicles chooses two that are *failures*. Xerxes' invasion of Greece, with hordes of troops, culminated in the great Athenian victory at Marathon. And Darius' invasion of Scythia similarly ended in utter defeat. These invasions resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Xerxes and Darius' own people.

Callicles argues that these actions (and presumably the "countless others" as well) were conducted "in accordance with the nature of what's just—yes, by Zeus, in accordance with the *law of nature*" (483e).[158] This is the first known use of this phrase in literature. By "law of nature," Callicles means that ideas of equality, nobility, and justice are nothing other than—to borrow imagery from the *Republic*—chains designed to restrain the best and strongest individuals. Though Plato saves this imagery for the *Republic's* cave, the point is the same. Callicles laments that the best and most powerful youths are ensnared like lion cubs and tamed by "charms and incantations" until they slavishly uphold the ideal of human equality. But Callicles believes that if a sufficiently powerful man breaks the chains of convention, he will "rise up and be revealed as our master" (484a). Anticipating Nietzsche, such a superman will trample men's laws,

[158] The two formulations are interesting. Callicles is apparently so excited (hence the curse "by Zeus") that he extends his first claim "the nature of what's just" to a *nomos*—the law or convention of nature. It is likely that Callicles intends this to be an interesting rhetorical juxtaposition or paradox. Dodds helpfully adds that: "Callicles' coinage is not to be confused with 'natural law' in the Stoic sense…or with the modern scientist's 'laws of Nature,' which are simply observed uniformities. Callicles' 'laws of Nature' is not a generalization about Nature but a rule of conduct on the analogy of 'natural behavior." Plato, *Gorgias: A Revised Text with Notes and Commentary*: 260-61.

conventions, and habits that violate nature, and "the justice of nature" will shine forth (484a-b).

This radicalization of Gorgias' teaching—Callicles' rhetor-king—shows what, for Plato, occurs in the second generation of sophistic rhetoricians. Unsurprisingly, it is here that Callicles famously attempts to shame Socrates and, in so doing, reveals his own intemperance. Callicles says that Socrates will acknowledge the "truth of the matter," as soon as he sets philosophy aside and moves on to more important things. Callicles here inverts the hierarchy of the *Republic*. In his upside-down world, philosophy is the lowest stage on an intellectual ladder that culminates in the truth of natural tyranny. Though Callicles concedes that philosophy is a "delightful" thing in moderation and when one is young, he warns Socrates against its "undoing of mankind" (484c-d). For, when one engages in philosophy as an adult, one loses the capacity to gain experience in the laws and practices of the city, in the speeches one must make in private and public associations with fellow citizens, in the pleasures and appetites, and "the ways of human beings altogether" (484e).

For Callicles, then, men become mature when they become as unjust, irrational, and power-driven as he believes is reflected in nature herself. In this respect, he mirrors one of the most infamous demagogues in ancient Greece, Cleon ("the most violent" Athenian) who, during his famous debate with Diodotus over the punishment of the Mytileneans in the *History*, castigated the Athenians for preferring intelligence over force and a concomitant tendency to give in to things incompatible with empire: "pity, enjoyment of speeches and evenhandedness."[159] According to Cleon's view, the making of unreasonable demands on reality was nothing other than begging for fortune to deliver

[159] Thucydides 3.40.

a pounding. The idea of equality, condemned by Callicles, is similarly understood by Cleon as illusory—a goal that only the naïve attempt to impose on the world. Cleon and Callicles are incapable of seeing that, rather than suppressing strong souls, noble ideas serve to remind us of the best things human beings are capable of.

Polus and Callicles' hubristic position has the further consequence of undermining the natural or appropriate civic limits on rhetoric and politics recognized by Gorgias. After all, they both preach—very loudly—the benefit and superiority of injustice, in contrast to Gorgias' explicit commitment to teach justice to his students. I believe that Callicles' intemperate desire for glory and dominance is meant to reflect the accelerated pace of Athenian imperialism in the later generation. This quickening generated excesses of speech and hubristic deeds such as: the mass execution and enslavement at Scione, the slaughter at Melos, and the subsequent Sicilian Expedition that resulted in a disaster for Athens and the permanent loss of autonomy for Gorgias' own Leontini. For Plato, the combination of Gorgian agnosticism with respect to reality (or being),[160] and the fevered climate of wartime Athens, with its exposure to and participation in spectacles of moral depravity so acutely depicted by Thucydides, generated the philosophy of greed and power that ultimately led to the misery of the *polis* and every individual within it. Note, however, that for Plato the intellectual basis for the subsequent Athenian *ethos* of immorality can be traced to the implications of *Gorgias'* teaching—all that was needed was famine, plague and war to break down the previous understandings that gave meaning and stability to life and replace them with a new one.

Returning to the dialogue, Socrates asks Callicles how Pindar (the professional praise-singer if ever there was one) and he would explain justice according to nature.

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[160] See his thoroughgoing negative beliefs in *On Not Being* discussed above and in Woodruff, "Rhetoric and Relativism: Protagoras and Gorgias," 305-06.

Socrates suggests that Callicles' position is that the superior should forcibly take away the property of the inferior, that the better should rule the worse, and sums them up as saying that the strong violently bear away the property of the weaker, and the worthy get more than the less worthy. After confirming that this is still Callicles' position, Socrates asks him if he considers the same man to be both "better" and "stronger." In light of Callicles' earlier thesis about the natural right of the great powers to bully weaker states (reminiscent but, as we shall see, not identical to the position taken by the Athenians in the Melian Dialogue), Socrates wonders if "strength," "superiority," and "better" are for Callicles' the same thing, and whether being better or worse is nothing other than an empirical question of physical power (488b-d). Once Callicles states that all three are the same, Socrates asks him whether the many are stronger than the one since, as Callicles previously argued, they are the ones who impose the laws. Callicles agrees to this, only to then be asked whether, since the many are stronger, their laws are therefore superior and "admirable (*kalon*) by nature" (488e-489a). Socrates then asks Callicles if the many observe the rule that it is just to have equality and that doing injustice is shameful. After Callicles reluctantly admits that the many do observe this rule or view, Socrates points out that by Callicles' own logic, pursuing equality and the shame of doing injustice is not merely convention, but is also true by nature (489b-c).

It is important to notice that Socrates is not simply showing his intellectual superiority to Callicles here. Rather, he is trying to show the naturalness or inherent internal-ness of shame, which Callicles claims to transcend by labeling it a failure to understand the *nomos/phusis* distinction. That is, when Callicles accuses Polus and Gorgias of succumbing to shame, he claims that the emotion of shame is *externally* imposed and, therefore, cannot affect someone who understands its mere conventionality. But Callicles now appears to feel shame himself. Richard McKim makes this point

exceptionally clear: "our shame about vice is a natural sign that deep down we prefer virtue. What Callicles calls our 'natural' beliefs represent for Socrates the artificial virtues imposed upon us from without by such corrupting influences as a Gorgianic rhetorical education."[161] Paul Woodruff refers to this "Socratic shame" as "solipsized shame"—described as "the full awareness that one has betrayed values that are entirely one's own."[162] If Gorgias represents the sophistic withdrawal into rhetorical technique, the brutal circumstances of the war induce men like Callicles to give up trying to manipulate *nomos*, using those same rhetorical techniques to convince themselves of the truth of choosing force and injustice without shame as an end in itself.

Socrates now encourages Callicles to continue speaking frankly so that they can together determine the best way to live. Callicles claims that the life of virtue consists of unbridled desire, letting appetites grow as large as possible and fulfilling them in every possible way. Socrates then asks whether it is mistaken to characterize those who need nothing as happy. Callicles rejects this opinion out of hand, because "in that case stones and corpses would be happiest" (492e). As a matter of plausibility, Callicles' theory of instant gratification is obviously incomplete, since it fails to account for things such as delayed gratification. Socrates immediately points out the strangeness of Callicles' view. To adequately maintain a constant flow of expanding desires and their satisfaction would require that the soul be a "leaky jar" in constant need of replenishment, and that this kind of human being would lead the life of a *charadrios*, a bird that excretes while it eats.[163] Put differently, Callicles' ideal human's appetites would be as excessive, harmful, and

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[161] Richard McKim, "Shame and Truth in Plato's Gorgias," in *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings*, ed. Charles L. Griswold (New York: Routledge, 1988), 39.
[162] Paul Woodruff, "Socrates and the Irrational," in *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy*, ed. Nicholas D. Smith and Paul Woodruff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 144.
[163] Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 154.

wasteful as his exertions to satisfy them would be long, dangerous, and arduous. Arlene Saxonhouse applies the parable of the leaky jar to the city as well as the individual soul. She observes that because "filling the city is like filling the leaky jar…(Athens) can never be fully satisfied."[164] This is why when Callicles mentions the storied names of Miltiades, Themistocles, Cimon, and Pericles as men who improved the Athenians, Socrates responds that this could only be the case if virtue were synonymous with satisfying desires (one's own as well as others).[165]

In stark contrast with Callicles, Socrates argues that the pursuit of pleasure in itself cannot organize a life in such a way to generate happy flourishing (*eudaimonia*). Callicles' life of pleasure is a life without organization, which itself requires self-rule:

> It looks as though anyone who wants to be happy must seek out and practice self-discipline, and beat as hasty a retreat as possible away from self-indulgence. The best course would be for him to see to it that he never had to be restrained, but if he or anyone close to him (whether that's and individual person or a whole community) does ever need it, then he must let justice and restraint be imposed, or else forfeit happiness….We should devote all our own and our community's energies towards ensuring the presence of justice and self-discipline, and so guaranteeing happiness….We shouldn't refuse to restrain our desires, because that condemns us to a life of endlessly trying to satisfy them. And this is the life of a predatory outlaw. (507c-e)

For Socrates, a life devoted to pleasure fulfillment is a mindless life—organized (if one can call it this) around what he will call in the *Republic* the non-rational part of our being. Socrates objects to Callicles' account on the ground that it makes the very good that is sought after (pleasure) dependent on the removal of a pain in order to bring the pleasure into being. In other words, pleasure itself depends on a prior depravation or pain. Thus,

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[164] Arlene Saxonhouse, "An Unspoken Theme in Plato's *Gorgias*: War," *Interpretation* 11, no. 2 (1983): 166.

[165] I agree with Stauffer that this exchange indicates that Callicles believes, with Pericles, that the underlying glory of Athens is more important than improving the souls of the Athenians. Stauffer, *The Unity of Plato's Gorgias: Rhetoric, Justice, and the Philosophic Life*: 129.

the pleasure of eating requires one to be hungry and the pleasure of scratching requires an itch. And, for Socrates, this cannot be enough to create a happy life. Instead, the happy life is essentially about rule, and requires that reason control and organize the non-rational parts of our being. Pleasure cannot be a final end in itself that amounts to happiness. This is because, for Socrates, happiness is discovered during the course of an entire life, unlike pleasure which cannot coexist with pain. Searching for pleasure inevitably falls short of what is required to achieve happiness over the course of one's whole life (494b-497a).[166] Furthermore, if satisfying our desire for pleasure is the sole criteria for happiness, how can we understand our admiration for the traditional virtues, which typically demand self-sacrifice or self-rule? For example, we shun cowards, even—perhaps especially—when they achieve more pleasure than the courageous. The pursuit of pleasure as a normative standard cannot, by itself, generate this stance. This is why Socrates believes that the life of the temperate man is both blessed and happy and anyone who desires happiness should flee from intemperance. In his opinion, one must consistently strive to direct all the aspects of one's life—as well as the goals of one's *polis*—toward happiness through temperance and justice. The *ethos* of Callicles is, according to Socrates, the path of *akolasia*—"the life of a marauder" (507c-e).

This is an essential point and worth pausing over. The life of a marauder, which applies equally to the *polis* as to an individual soul, is so powerfully damaging because it alienates us from ourselves and from others. Socrates tries to show Callicles that such a man could never be "dear to another man or to a god" because he is unable to partner with others—to live in common or community (*koinonia*). And, as we saw in our earlier discussion of *philia*, where there is no community there can be no friendship. According

[166] This focus on ultimate ends is why Socrates can easily condemn Themistocles, even though his policy was one of long-term gratification.

to Socrates, then, the intemperate soul cannot become friends with gods or men because there is no friendship within his own soul—only a frenzied and insatiable tyranny of desire.

We are now in a position to see how Socrates' condemnation of Callicles' encomium to the life of *pleonexia* is nothing less than the severest possible attack on fifth century Athenian leadership. The ongoing war with Persia led to the steady erosion of morals and a growing opportunism justified on the basis of necessity (*ananke*)—all the while making possible the great economic and cultural progress that led to the building of the Acropolis, and Pericles' proud proclamation of Athens as the "school of Hellas" (2.41). In this sense, there is substantial similarity between the imperialist Athenian regime and the rule of Archelaus, with its combination of authoritarianism and high culture. During this time, Athens' former allies in the Persian War irrevocably became tribute-paying members of an Athenian Empire from which attempts to escape were met with violence. As we saw in Chapter Two, the apotheosis of this view is voiced in the Melian Dialogue, where the Athenians state to the much weaker Melians that: "justice is what is decided when equal forces are opposed, but when one side is stronger, it gets as much as it can, and the weak must accept that" (5.89).[167]

This bleak vision of the world posits both human beings and cities as naturally existing in a state of war. The implication of this view is that law is nothing more than convention and is supported by nothing other than the threat of violence. Therefore, the wise and prudent recognize that the highest values in these circumstances are security and survival and it is quite easy to make moral compromises when the lives of one's *philoi* are at stake. This is why Socrates cautions Callicles against trying to emulate the

[167] Here I combine Lattimore and Woodruff's translation to make the point more clearly.

Athenian regime for the sake of gaining power. Socrates likens this attempt to the Thessalian witches, who were reputed to gain a power sufficient to cause an eclipse by killing a loved one. Similarly, Callicles is told to be careful what he wishes for: it will not profit him to gain power over the *polis* at "the cost of what we hold most dear" (513b). Socrates then argues that the job of rulers, properly understood, should be to tend or "care for" the *polis* and its citizenry in such a way to make them "as good as possible" (513d-e).

If this is the true purpose of the rulers, the question of their authority and credentials becomes critically important. How can prospective rulers demonstrate their competence in areas they know little about? Socrates uses the example of building projects to make his point. When it comes to major works of construction, he suggests that their advocates present the people with evidence of having successfully completed these kinds of projects in their private capacity (514a-515b). This is not only a matter of suitability; it is also a serious question of resource allocation and is another indictment of the Athenian regime. The analogy to the war is simply this: successful leadership in times of war implies having experience or knowing whether or not it is necessary or wise to go to war *in the first place*. The most obvious example of this distinction can be seen in the debate over the Sicilian Expedition. While Thucydides suggests that Alcibiades was probably the most competent to lead the expedition, he was—from a Socratic perspective—among the least competent to care for the interests of the *polis* when the question was the *necessity* of war. Thucydides describes Alcibiades' motives for the Sicilian Expedition as follows:

> Alcibiades made the most spirited case for the expedition partly out of his desire to cross Nicias (with whom he had been at odds on other points of state)…Mainly, however, it was because he wanted to have a command and hoped to be the man who would take both Sicily and Carthage for Athens, and,

> with success, to increase his own personal wealth and glory. Because he was highly esteemed by the citizens, he had desires that were too vast for his actual estate to support…Later on this was one of the main causes for the destruction of Athens. (6.15)

Ironically, Nicias, who was among the least competent to lead the expedition, was probably more competent (though rhetorically challenged) to advise the *polis* on the necessity of war: "for he thought the city had made the wrong decision to take on the conquest of all Sicily—an enormous task—on a slight and specious pretext. So he came forward with the intention of changing their minds, and gave this advice to the Athenians" (6.8).

Seen in this context, it is immediately obvious why it is so important for Socrates that questions regarding competence, prudence and maturity be asked of prospective rulers. In its absence, considerations such as appearance, wealth, political connections, family history, and sheer demagogic charm will trump temperance. As we shall see in the *Republic*, Socrates argues that the best rulers will be among those most hesitant to rule, and that people with private virtue will be best suited to serve as rulers because they will at least be able to see the folly of hubristic projects like the Sicilian Expedition that seduce citizens with avarice and greed away from justice and temperance. This, of course, is why Socrates criticizes Athens' canon of past leaders: Miltiades, Themistocles, Cimon, and Pericles. Socrates specifically indicts Pericles for making the Athenians wild and reckless: "A man like that who cared for donkeys or horses or cattle would at least look bad if he showed these animals kicking, butting, and biting him because of their wildness, when they had been doing none of these things when he took them over" (516b). While we might argue that, in fact, the Athenians regretted their anger at Pericles by restoring him to office before his untimely death, it is nevertheless true that he failed to curb their hubris and, after his death, left them with a regime that "managed the state

for their private ambition and private gain, to the detriment of themselves and their allies" (2.65).

Socrates saves his most damning indictment for last: that Athens' great leaders turned a free people into a slavish mob focused on appearances and incapable of ruling (or even knowing) themselves. The ignorant many end up praising the very bakers and wine merchants who enable them to grow lethargic and diseased (518c-e). However, Socrates points out that, rather than blame those who truly cause the disease, the ignorant will erroneously indict those who happen to rule when the symptoms become present and painful. He scolds Callicles for singing the praises of those:

> who threw parties for these people [the Athenians], and who feasted them lavishly with what they had an appetite for. And they say that *they* have made the city great! But that the city is swollen and festering, thanks to those early leaders, that they don't notice. For they filled the city with harbors and dockyards, walls, and tribute payments and such trash as that, but did so without justice and self-control. (519a)

The *Gorgias* concludes with what Socrates says Callicles will consider a myth (*mythos*), but that he considers a "fine account" (*logos*) of judgment. The myth/account incorporates the various positions Socrates has defended during the course of the dialogue. According to it, men will no longer be judged by false appearance, rhetoric, or flattery because everyone at this court (judges included) will be naked and, therefore, immune to the seduction of appearance. The judges will see only the souls of the dead, and judge them with unfiltered eyes (which is why they are naked as well). Interestingly, the judge who would deal with the Athenians, Aeacus, was the fabled king of Aegina, the hereditary enemy of Athens. It is also noteworthy that Minos, another great Athenian foe, will hear appeals of Aeacus' ruling. This would be as concerning to citizens of imperial Athens as it is irrelevant to Socrates. In a manner somewhat akin to John Rawls' original position, Socrates' decision procedure focuses attention squarely on the

moral character of the soul appearing before the judges. Judgments become largely self-evident; just as the body of a corpse retains the physical damage it had sustained while alive, the souls of the dead retain the records of the good and evil deeds they performed during their time on earth.

Through his myth or account, Socrates effectively practices "the true political art," by restoring knowledge to the individual soul (521d). Like medicine, which restores health to the sick, Socratic dialectic is meant to be the cure to the corrupting disease of *pleonexia*. For Socrates, there is no way to escape the consequences of our injustices if we want to live well—sooner or later we must eventually look inward and come to grips with the consequences of our offences. Likewise, Athens will have to look inward to purge herself of the predatory spirit, destructive glory, and *pleonectic* imperialism of Cimon and Pericles. She will no longer be preoccupied with power, accumulation, and appearance—all part of the warlike worldview that has come to plague her and led her citizens to see the world as a zero-sum game that requires a dominant strategy of exploitation. Socrates argues that what she will lose in pride, tribute, and trade, she will gain in self-understanding.

As we've observed, Callicles uses language strikingly similar to that of Thucydides' Athenian Ambassadors at Melos. The Ambassadors, for example, use the phrase *ou an krate archein*, "to rule whomever one exceeds in strength," while Callicles uses *ton kreitto tou hettonos archein*, "that the stronger rule the weaker" (5.105, 483d). By using the same or similar expressions, Plato may be deliberately echoing the Melian Dialogue.[168] However, the kinship between the two passages has, I believe, led to a misunderstanding of the Melian Dialogue. In order to see the relevant differences, it is

[168] Adding to this, both Thucydides and Plato give a prominent place to the terms *nomos* (law/custom) and *phusis* (nature), both distinguish between two forms of shame or dishonor, and both present the same theory of power that is supposed to justify certain forms of domination.

useful to reflect first upon the primary intentions of the speakers in each case. Let us briefly re-examine each of the arguments from this perspective.

I think it is fair to say that Callicles' goal in the dialogue is to justify certain kinds of actions which—as Polus has granted earlier—to the average Greek appear to be shameful. In order to achieve his goal, Callicles introduces a sharp distinction between *phusis* and *nomos* which allows him to classify the same action as shameful under one of these headings, but not under the other one, and *vice versa*. Thus, in his opinion, *pleonexia*, "graspingness or a desire to have more than one's proper share" of wealth and power, is shameful and unjust according to convention (*nomos*), but just according to nature (*phusis*). The essence of Callicles' argument is that:

> this is what's admirable and just by nature—and I'll say it to you now with all frankness—that the man who'll live correctly ought to allow his own appetites to get as large as possible and not restrain them. And when they are as large as possible, he ought to be competent to devote himself to them by virtue of his bravery and intelligence, and to fill them with whatever he may have an appetite for at the time. (491e-492a)

As we've seen, Callicles claims that law (*nomos*) is an unnatural constraint promoted by the weak, who fear the power and mastery of the strong. Hence, it is not just according to nature for the strong man to abide by law's constraints on his natural power. According to Callicles, the strong man should allow his desires to continually expand and to increase his power to such an extent as he can fulfill them. As a result, Callicles argues that desire and power must be congruent in order for the *pleonectic* man to be successful. For Callicles, the happiest man is the successful grasping tyrant, whose enormous power is capable of gratifying the largest number of desires (particularly material desires). He explains his understanding of *pleonexia* using the examples of Xerxes and Darius which he believes cut to the heart of his teaching of natural justice. As we discussed, Callicles considers imperialistic invasion as the prime example of the

natural law that the superior should rule over the inferior. He goes on to add the example of Heracles, who according to Pindar, "drove off Geryon's cattle, even though he hadn't paid for them and Geryon hadn't given them to him, on the ground that this is what's just by nature, and that cattle and all the other possessions of those who are worse and inferior belong to the one who's better and superior" (484b-c). Here Callicles says that natural law dictates that the stronger man should use his greater power to gratify his desire to possess, at the expense of the weaker and, therefore, at the expense of conventional justice. As Roslyn Weiss puts it: "in Callicles' twisted view, the oxen actually belonged to Heracles (so that he is not really stealing them), because the possessions of the inferior and weaker belong to the superior and stronger."[169]

Callicles then goes on to "coin a new and paradoxical phrase, as *nai ma dia* indicates," the phrase namely *kata nomon ge ton tes phuseos*, "according to the *nomos* of nature" (483e).[170] This *nomos* he contrasts with the norms we enact which require "the best and most powerful among us" to acknowledge that the just and noble thing is equality, and to behave accordingly. The reference to the *nomos* of nature points to a different set of norms and thus seems to mark a transition from the factual, customary behavior of animals and men to a normative code based upon it. In the human domain there is, of course, a necessary transition from a factual starting point (*is*) to normative results (*ought*). Every community has certain customs and manners of behaving. An anthropologist may describe these customs in a roughly neutral way, but the community itself not only knows those customs, it also approves some of them and rejects others and expects its members to abide by the former. Thus, the approved way individuals *actually*

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[169] Roslyn Weiss, "Wise Guys and Smart Alecks in *Republic* 1 and 2," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 94.
[170] Plato, *Gorgias: A Revised Text with Notes and Commentary*.

behave becomes the way they and others *ought to behave*. Custom becomes law if and when it is deemed good by the community. Therefore, to act according to sanctioned custom is to act in the lawful, justified way. Callicles here makes the move of going from unqualified custom to approved, sanctioned custom, or law. Nature customarily behaves in a certain way and thus, he holds, makes manifest that it is *just* to behave that way. And, indeed, according to Callicles, the rights of the stronger are grounded in nature and these rights justify the particular kinds of domination he speculates about—for example, what we could expect to see from someone endowed with a strong nature, capable of reducing us to slavery and establishing himself as "our lord and master." His might would make his right.

In the ensuing debate, Socrates hones in on the nature of Callicles' desire, forcing him (and us) to see that his lust for power is merely instrumental. What Callicles really desires are the material possessions and pleasures that power brings. Specifically, Callicles does not really want more desires and the power to fulfill them, but rather wants to get more material possessions than he currently has. According to Socrates, Callicles' arguments are vacuous—in spite of his lofty rhetoric about the law of nature and rule of the stronger he is at bottom nothing other than an exceptionally greedy materialist. This is why Socrates is able to so effectively undermine and enrage Callicles by presenting the life devoted to *pleonexia* as no different from the life of the catamite (494e). By extension, Socrates advances the proposition that the position of the Athenian Ambassadors at Melos is similarly suspect (at least philosophically) and, at root, nothing more than shameful greed.[171]

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[171] Plato gives us some evidence that Thrasymachus and Callicles' views were widespread in Athens. In Book II of the *Republic*, Glaucon says that while he still believes that the just life is superior to the unjust life, his support may be wavering since his ears "are deafened listening to Thrasymachus and countless others" (358c). Many of the Athenian elite, he suggests, have come to not only embrace the life of greed but to elevate it as a philosophic and cultural ideal. Thucydides' *History* provides further proof, illustrating

Unlike Callicles and Socrates in the *Gorgias*, in the Melian Dialogue we find the Athenians and the Melians not just hypothesizing about a kind of domination that would arise if someone were born with a "strong nature." The Athenians have already landed troops on Melos and are about to begin siege operations to reduce the city to ruin. The basic Athenian goal in the dialogue, then, is to undermine the will of the Melians to resist. This military goal will not necessarily be achieved by providing *justification* for Athenian actions. Paradoxically, this would (in their view) weaken them. What, then, is the role of the principle that might makes right at Melos? Recall that early in the Melian Dialogue, the Athenians declare that they will not bring forth any arguments based on justice. Particular examples of what they will not say include: that they rule justly because they defeated the Persians, and that they have come to revenge an injustice done to them. They ask in return that the Melians refrain from arguing that (though they were originally Spartan colonists) they did not join the Peloponnesian League or that they have done the Athenians no injustice (5.89).

It is interesting that the first argument, which the Athenians refrain from using is simply invalid. It does not follow that because the Athenians were the greatest military force behind the Greek victory over the Persians sixty years ago that they *now* have a right to dominate other cities. And the Athenians' second argument is, if not invalid, at least unsound. It is very unlikely that the Melians ever staged an attack on Athenian territory (Thucydides certainly says nothing to this effect). Hence, the second Melian argument—that they have done the Athenians no wrong—is both sound and valid. Finally, the first Melian argument was perhaps sound given the *nomos* of the times. The Dorian descent of the Melians probably *did* imply that they would have been justified in

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how Athenians collectively (and proudly) identify themselves with their own *pleonexia*, believing that they are behaving in accordance with a time-honored principle of self-interest in international relations. For Thucydides, *pleonexia* is a primal impulse of nature encouraged by culture.

joining the Peloponnesian League. Since they did not join it, Athenian aggression is therefore unjustifiable.

If this analysis is correct, the Athenians have much to lose and nothing to gain if the debate at Melos is conducted in terms of rights, justice, and/or the *nomos* of the times. Their case would be quite weak on all three counts. However, they do not therefore argue, like Callicles, that these are merely conventional notions that they counter with a law of nature or the right of the stronger. They do not, like Callicles, put forth two different understandings of justice. Rather, they sharply distinguish between justice, on the one hand, and advantage, expediency, or self interest on the other. Thus, there is here no attempt by the Athenians to *justify* what they threaten to do to the Melians. They simply say that it would be mutually advantageous for the Melians to surrender. For the Athenians, expediency should rule the day.

When the Melians propose neutrality, the Athenians concede that though any city may have "legal arguments" for neutrality (or the right to remain neutral), the neutrality of any city—and especially weak ones located on islands—actually harms Athenian interests. When the Melians (finally) confess their trust in divine favor and Spartan assistance, the Athenians expose their underlying theory of power. They do not say, like Callicles, that it is just for the stronger to rule the weaker—they say that justice is irrelevant (5.89). In its place, they assert that "nature always compels" both gods (as far as they can tell) and men to always rule if they happen to be stronger. It is unclear whether this principle necessarily carries with it any normative force, or whether it purports to be purely descriptive: power dictates—there is no room for debate and no room for normative law. For their part, it seems that the Athenians believe it to be descriptive, since they hasten to add that this principle is independent of any agency. There appears to be no choice in the matter. Their reference to an "innate compulsion"

may not serve as an attempt to justify their actions, but instead to explain why this "has always been obvious" (5.105).

The Athenians claim that this is a *nomos*. But does this particular *nomos* carry with it any normative force? The Athenians say explicitly that they had no part in its enactment and in fact were not the first to embrace it—it is a law of nature just like the laws of physics. This n*omos* is apparently nothing other than the custom or usual behavior of gods and men in the past, the present, and for all eternity. Even the Melians would, according to the Athenians, follow this practice were they sufficiently strong. Whether they *ought* to follow it is simply irrelevant. No contrast is drawn here between *phusis* and *nomos*—both are *descriptive* concepts from which no transition is made to a normative concept like justice.[172] The Athenians have no desire to claim that what they are doing is just or right, perhaps since it would be grossly inconsistent with their own earlier rules for the debate. They simply wish to warn the Melians about what happens in the real world, a world in which moral notions are nothing more than tantalizing yet illusory words that lead people to their own destruction (as we saw earlier at Corcyra).[173] This, then, is what the Athenians argue. But is their description of the "real world" accurate? Is what they say in fact true?

The basic Athenian position is that in any conflict between un-equals, the stronger party rules the weaker. To show this to be false, we need to find (in the pages of Thucydides or elsewhere) an instance where a stronger party confronts a weaker one but nevertheless allows the weaker party to remain neutral. The Athenians refuse to allow this as a matter of argument (not as a matter of empirics—since they did allow some island cities to remain neutral). Rather, they insist that the only reason a weaker party

[172] Compare 5.102 with 3.45.3, 3.45.7, 3.84.2, and 2.53.4.
[173] In my view, it remains an open question to what extent the Athenians sincerely believe this.

could remain neutral would be due to its power and, therefore, that the stronger power was not as strong as it appeared. But if this is so, then the only way to really determine power is by domination. There is no independent way of determining power.

If the foregoing account of the positions of Callicles and of the Athenian Ambassadors is correct—namely that Callicles advances a normative theory while the Athenian Ambassadors make a descriptive claim, it follows that undermining these doctrines require fundamentally different approaches. And refuting them is an urgent task for anyone wishing to resist political actions taken in their name.[174] Let us briefly look at how this might be done.

As we've seen, Socrates ultimately undermines Callicles because Callicles is willing to make further normative and evaluative claims, especially the claim that the indiscriminate enjoyment of pleasure constitutes happiness (491e-492c). This allows Socrates to show that there are serious inconsistencies in Callicles' value system. For example, his claim that no one can hope to stay in power in a city like Athens while at the same time enjoying the life of the catamite or enjoying the pleasures of the coward when he sees the enemy troops retreating (494b-495a; 497d-499b). Since there is no direct evidence that counts, on its own and by itself, against a normative or evaluative claim, Socrates' strategy seems sound. We mentioned the deliberate irony on Plato's part by having Callicles cite Darius and Xerxes as evidence for the principle that it is right for the strong to rule the weak, since Darius came close to complete disaster at the Danube while

[174] The Athenian speakers at Sparta say that Athens acquired its empire for the "three greatest" reasons: fear, honor, and profit. These speakers candidly acknowledge that Athens is motivated by the desire for profit in maintaining its empire and in pursuing further conquests. This understanding of greed is justified by the Athenians' perception of their empire as a possession and by their belief that their former allies—forcefully brought into the empire—are their "slaves." Naturally, this attitude dovetails with basic ideas of property ownership, and links Thucydides' conception of Athenian imperialism more closely to Thrasymachus and Callicles' conception of the strong man's successful *pleonexia*. As Pericles forthrightly admits in his final speech to the Athenians: "The Empire you possess is like a tyranny. It may have been unjust to acquire, it is perilous to relinquish it" (2.63).

his son was totally defeated in Greece. By themselves, these facts are not inconsistent with a claim to be acting according to natural justice. Indeed, one could argue that Darius and Xerxes' right remained uncontested as long as they retained their might and Callicles does claim that according to nature one needs no justification for invading other than the right of the strong to rule the weak (and to have more). That the loss of might implies the loss of right is also reflected in the *Gorgias* when Socrates puts forth the argument that if the majority are stronger than the tyrant and decide to replace greed with equality as the central principle of justice, then equality would be just not only by convention but also by nature, which is inconsistent with Callicles' original distinction (488b-489b).

In both the *History* and the *Gorgias*, then, we see that the problem of *pleonexia* inexorably leads to violence and tyranny. We also see that the sophist position of dividing the natural (*phusis*) and the political or conventional (*nomos*) has radical implications for both thought and deed. The sophists, represented by the Athenian Ambassadors at Melos and in the positions of Gorgias, Polus and Callicles in the *Gorgias*, question the foundations and values of the Greek *polis* by stressing the differences between the natural world and the moral values that ground the political community. This distinction has the tendency to favor natural desires over (or independent of) any particular societal customs, laws, or traditions. Nature is redefined as hostile to man-made laws and communal laws. Written or unwritten laws cease to be divine and, as a result, no longer rise above the flux inherent in the natural world. Victor Ehrenberg notes that: "The Nomos changed from sacred tradition to a purely human convention, against which 'nature,' the *phusis* of the autonomous individual, rebelled."[175]

[175] Victor Ehrenberg, *The Greek State* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1960), 99.

However, Callicles remains unconvinced. I believe this reflects Plato's recognition that the rhetoric required to convince someone like Callicles to abandon the world of aggression and greed for that of friendship and virtue is inadequate to the task. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates and Callicles simply talk *at* each other not *with* each other. Succeeding in this effort will require the fairly drastic remedy of reconstituting the entire city, which will be conducted by Socrates in the *Republic*. The solution proposed in the *Gorgias* is inadequate or insufficient because a happy life based exclusively on individual virtue is only possible within a just city. Looking exclusively to individual virtue to establish justice in a pleonectic *polis* like imperial Athens is doomed to fail. This is why Plato returns to the challenge in the *Republic*, and so shall we, in Chapter Four.

Chapter 3: Thucydides' Pericles and Plato's *Protagoras*

Plato's *Protagoras* is a wonderful example of how Plato purposefully draws our attention not only to events of the Peloponnesian War but also to Thucydides' *History* in particular. When Protagoras is laying out the purpose of his instructional program to Socrates, he says that he will instruct Hippocrates about:

> good judgment (*euboulia*) about domestic matters, so that he may best manage his own household, and about political affairs, so that in affairs of the *polis* he may be most able both in action and in speech.
>
> Socrates: Am I following what you say? I think you mean political knowledge (*techne*), and you promise to make men good citizens.
>
> Protagoras: That is exactly what I proclaim. (319a, underline mine)[176]

The *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* database shows only a single other reference in all of Greek literature where the underlined group of words is used to convey preeminence in action and speech—Thucydides' introduction to Pericles' first speech in the *History*.[177] By linking the *Protagoras* so explicitly to Thucydides, Plato directly connects his portrait of Protagoras to Thucydides' portrait of Protagoras' most famous student, Pericles. By doing so, Plato invites us to consider the hypothesis that it is Protagorean thought that provided the assumptions (concealed and pessimistic) about human nature that supported the optimism of the Greek Enlightenment, embodied in Pericles.

Thucydides speaks here in his own name and introduces Pericles as "the first man in Athens at that time, the ablest in both speaking and acting" (1.139). As Neil O'Sullivan puts it: "The identity of the diction and the absence of the phrase from the rest

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[176] *Early Greek Political Thought from Homer to the Sophists*: 175. Unless otherwise specified, all references to Protagoras are from this edition and are cited by Diels-Kranz number.

[177] Neil O'Sullivan, "Pericles and Protagoras," *Greece & Rome* 42, no. 01 (1995). O'Sullivan reports that the only other phrase that comes close is from the rhetorical work *Peri Skematon* by an Alexander who lived in second century A.D. and who quotes Thucydides nine times in the work. O'Sullivan concludes that Alexander "made up an example by adapting a phrase of the historian." Ibid., 23.

of Greek literature must raise a strong *prima facie* case that Plato is here [at *Protagoras* 319a] recalling the historian's description of Pericles."[178] Plato points to Thucydides' presentation of Pericles at precisely the point in the dialogue where Socrates introduces the question of virtue and its teachability that will echo through the rest of the dialogue. I believe that he does this to draw our attention to the practical political consequences of Protagorean thought. As Protagoras' most famous student, Pericles represents Protagoras' ideal statesman and the end product of his educational system. We can, then, think of Thucydides' Pericles as a mouthpiece for Protagoras, and Plato encourages us to understand post-Periclean Athens as Protagoras and Pericles' true offspring.[179]

As we saw in our discussion of the *Gorgias*, the fundamental disagreement between Socrates and Callicles concerns the question of justice, which is the quintessential political virtue. The problem of Athenian imperialism and its concomitant moral decline was a result of *collective* rather than individual behavior. Hence, a satisfactory response to the Calliclean challenge requires the political virtue of justice, which Plato only hints at in the *Gorgias*, but develops more fully in the *Protagoras*.[180] The *Protagoras* introduces the new themes of the political art (*politike techne*) and education because, for Plato, the political art is primarily or essentially the art of education—namely, educating the young in such a way as to ensure their future effectiveness as leaders and citizens. Thus, in the *Protagoras*, Socrates will put forth the position that the best life is one that combines the five classic virtues of piety, courage, temperance, wisdom, and justice, and will argue that virtue, properly understood, is the

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[178] Ibid., 21-22.

[179] See *Gorgias* 515e.

[180] Recall that in the *Gorgias*, Socrates asserts: "I believe that I'm one of a few Athenians—so as not to say I'm the only one, but the only one among our contemporaries—to take up the true political art (*politike techne*) and practice true politics" (521d).

truest form of pleasure. If in the *Gorgias* Socrates puts forth a primarily individual solution to the problem of *pleonexia*, he uses the *Protagoras* to begin exploring the *communal* virtues necessary to address the challenge. This question of civic virtue and education also play a significant role in the *Republic*, which we will examine in more detail in the next chapter.[181] For now, it is sufficient to say that a central theme for Plato in the *Protagoras* is the teachability of the political art, and that Plato ties Protagoras' claim to teach the political art directly to Thucydides' presentation of Pericles. Let us examine Pericles' speech in more detail.

What does Pericles teach the Athenians in his first speech? It is here, with his very first words, that Pericles persuades the Athenians to consider the inevitability of war with Sparta, to see their own resources for executing that war as superior to Sparta's and, therefore, to urge the Athenians to resist. This speech, then, sets in motion the course of events that will ultimately lead to the destruction of the Athenian Empire. Pericles asserts that: "it must be known that war is inevitable, but that if we accept it more readily, we will find our enemies less committed, and that out of the greatest dangers emerge the greatest honors for both city and individual" (1.144). In Thucydides' narrative, Pericles' speech occurs immediately after the majority of the Peloponnesian League votes for war against Athens. However, the Spartans do not immediately march into Attica and lay siege—they remain hesitant to commence hostilities and give the Athenians a final opportunity to avoid war. The terms, unfortunately, are too severe: the Spartans demand

[181] In Book II of the *Republic*, Socrates argues that virtue is advantageous because of its consequences, as well as being good in itself. It is, I think, Socrates' belief in this that explains why his first response to Glaucon and Adeimantus' desire that he show how a perfectly just man could be happy under conditions of depravation, pain, and injustice is to say he is "at a loss as to what to do…Indeed, I believe I'm incapable of it" (368b). For Socrates, the perfectly just life implies virtue's utility, which implies its ability to create happiness. As we saw in our discussion of the *Gorgias*, Socrates argues that injustice does irrevocable damage to an individual's soul and that by practicing virtue individuals can orient themselves toward happiness.

that the Athenians halt their siege of Potidaea, leave Aegina autonomous, and rescind the Megarian Decree which banned Megarians from Athenian ports and markets. Not surprisingly, the Athenians refuse these terms. The Spartans send a final embassy to Athens that announces: "the Lacedaemonians wish there to be peace, and there would be if you leave the Hellenes autonomous" (1.139). That is, the Spartans call for Athens to dismantle their empire and, in the very next chapter, Thucydides brings Pericles on stage to speak for the first time, advising the Athenians about how they should respond to the Spartan ultimatum. Because Thucydides gives Pericles no opposing speaker, he implies that Pericles is "unrivalled even among the Athenians of his time."[182]

Pericles begins his speech by arguing that it is not the Athenians, but the Spartans who are the instigators of the conflict. The existing treaty stated that any disputes between Athens and Sparta be resolved by binding arbitration. But rather than submit to arbitration, the Spartans threaten war. Pericles insists that the conflict is inevitable and that the Spartan demand is indistinguishable from slavery, since any compromise with Sparta will show a slavish desire for peace. In this sense, Pericles appeals to the Athenians' sense of honor by equating the coming conflict with the heroism and courage in the wars with Persia. He then moves to an assessment of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the Athenian Empire and the Peloponnesian League. He argues that Athens has little to fear since she holds an advantage over Sparta in all key respects. A prolonged conflict requires capital resources and the Spartans are but poor farmers, with neither large amounts of private wealth nor a treasury to draw upon. Given their paucity of resources, and the exiting dominance of the Athenian Navy, Pericles concludes that it

[182] Strauss, *The City and Man*: 213. Indeed, Pericles is the only named Athenian politician who speaks in the first two books of the *History* and, as Josiah Ober notes, Pericles' are the only speeches by an Athenian politician that are never countered or paired by opposing speeches. Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule*: 81.

is unlikely that Sparta will be able to raise a large enough navy or pay for the necessary naval experience to defeat the Athenians.[183]

Pericles continues, arguing that the Peloponnesian League's position is more precarious still because, unlike Athens, they are not an empire. Their form of political organization lacks any form of unified decision-making. In contrast to Athens' dominance—which Pericles will later call a "tyranny"—over her subjects, the Peloponnesian League has no single assembly capable of quickly guiding policy.[184] As a league, they are comprised of member cities that are primarily motivated by their own domestic interests, rendering collective action difficult and ponderous. For Pericles, though, it is Athenian wealth and Spartan poverty that will rule the day: "the most important way in which they [Sparta] will be hindered is through shortage of money, so long as they waste time by its slow provision; military opportunities are not stationary" (1.142). Furthermore, Pericles suggests that the Athenians shouldn't be terribly concerned about the Spartan Army, even though it is "capable of withstanding all Hellas in a single battle" (1.141). This is because, even if the Spartans establish a "small fort" in Attica that "might harm the country somewhat by raids and harboring runaways," the Athenians will still be able to launch substantially more debilitating naval attacks against Sparta:

> If they move against our country on land, we will sail against theirs, and from there on there will be no comparison between devastating one part of the whole Peloponnesos and the whole of Attica; they will not be able to replace land without fighting battles, but for us there is abundant land on both the islands and the mainland. (1.143)

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[183] Of course, readers of the *History* know that Pericles' predictions turn out to be mistaken on almost all counts.

[184] In his final speech, Pericles says that: "For you now hold it [the empire] like a tyranny that seems unjust to acquire but dangerous to let go" (2.63).

According to Pericles, in a war between land and sea, naval power is decisive. And the Athenians can count on lasting naval supremacy because their wealth (and Sparta's poverty) will enable them to prevent Spartan attempts to bribe the foreign sailors that make up the backbone of the Athenian Navy. Pericles then introduces the metaphor of Athens as an island:

> If we were islanders, who would be more unassailable? As it is, thinking like them as nearly as possible, we must let go of the land and its houses and stand guard over the sea and the city, and not let rage over the former drive us to fight against the much greater numbers of the Peloponnesians…nor lament over houses and land, but over lives; those do not create men, men create them. (1.143)

Pericles claims that the only place where Athens is vulnerable to Sparta is the Attic plain. He argues further that the fertile plain is nearly worthless—making the hyperbolic suggestion that if "I thought I would persuade you, I would have told you to go out and lay waste to your property yourselves" (1.143). Attica, then, is to be abandoned if necessary, and the Athenians should focus purely on their empire and the naval power necessary to maintain it, and ignore any Spartan destruction of their land. At first blush, it appears that Pericles is merely encouraging the Athenians to adopt the same strategy they successfully used during the Persian wars: abandon their houses and land, deprive the enemy of an easy victory on the field, and defeat the enemy using their ships. However, I think Pericles' vision is more than simply this—it is, in fact, a radical redefining of Athens as a city severed from its ancestral homeland. As we shall see, I think that both Plato and Thucydides argue that the sophistic habits of thought that lead to the redefinition of the city also lead inexorably to the slaughter at Melos and the disastrous Sicilian Expedition, and that Plato believes that the wellspring of this kind of thinking can be traced to Protagoras.

Pericles pulls off some slight of hand here with his island simile. He argues that if the Athenians "were islanders" they would be "unassailable." Because of this, he encourages them to think like islanders "as nearly as possible," which means to "let go of the land and its houses and stand guard over the sea and the city" (1.143). This "island" Pericles intends to defend includes neither the land nor the houses of Attica, but only what is behind Athens' walls, and the lands and islands of the empire. This is, of course, in stark contrast to *actual* islanders, who defend both their walls and land using the "walls" of the sea. Pericles' simile implies that, by following his plan, the Athenians will be doing nothing more than embracing a time-honored and well-tested strategy for victory. In truth, however, there is no comparison to what Pericles urges the Athenians to do. By following Pericles, the Athenians will not be acting like anyone at all, because it has never before been tried. This gap in Pericles' analogy serves to emphasize just how radical his new understanding of the city is. He redefines the city as wholly distinct or cut off from the "houses and land" of Attica. In the Persian War, the Athenian strategy was to abandon an Athens that "no longer existed, facing danger for one with small hope of existing" (1.74). They took to their ships with the "small hope" of reconstituting the same city in Attica after the fighting ceased. Pericles, on the other hand, persuades the Athenians to redefine the *polis* to *exclude* the land and homes of Attica, and *include* the rest of the empire and the sea. This proposal should be more shocking than it perhaps comes across in the *History* (and certainly to us), for the Athenians believed that Athens was founded by people birthed from the Attica soil itself (*autochthony*). As we shall see, Thucydides suggests that the Athenians will not so easily accept Pericles' newly imagined city—it is no less a city-in-speech than Socrates' *Kallipolis* in the *Republic*.

Pericles concludes his speech by saying that Athens will be victorious so long as the Athenians do not make any attempts to add to the empire or take on any "additional

dangers" (1.144). He goes so far as to say that he fears Athenian mistakes far more than Spartan planning (1.144). Pericles again reminds the Athenians that war is inevitable and that the greatest honors for both cities and individuals arise out of the greatest dangers. Thus, the Athenians should view this conflict as no different than the fight for freedom against the Persians. Just as their fathers did, the Athenians must now "resist our enemies by every means and attempt to hand it [the empire] on undiminished to our descendants" (1.144).[185] What's most remarkable about Pericles' argument is his emphasis on imagination (*gnome*). As Adam Parry puts it, "Pericles is represented as believing that, with a requisite amount of power and resource, and with the energy and devotion that is inherent in the Athenian nature, the intellect can in large part *make* the world."[186] Given such a valorization of the intellect's power to imagine, it is no surprise that Pericles isn't concerned about ancestral temples, tombs, fields, and homes. One can always imagine them as they were or, if necessary, build new ones. Yet, can a community really be nourished by such an imagined history? For Pericles, it seems that rhetoric and history are inextricably linked.

Returning to the *Protagoras*, Plato has Protagoras echo the unique phrasing Thucydides puts in the mouth of Pericles during his speech recommending war. Protagoras says that he will teach Hippocrates about: "domestic matters, so that he may best manage his own household, and about political affairs, *so that in affairs of the polis*

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[185] It strains credulity to think that there was no significant opposition to Pericles' advice. Yet, there is nothing in the *History* other than a report about the success of Pericles' speech. Perhaps this is simply a dramatization of how a democracy by a "first citizen" actually works. While there may be other speeches, the speech of only one man is truly considered. In this sense, and as we shall see, Athens is considerably less democratic than Sparta, and Pericles' speech may be seen as more similar to the demagoguery of Sthenelaidas than the statesmanship of Archidamus. On the similarities between the speeches of Pericles and Archidamus, see Edmund F. Bloedow, "The Speeches of Archidamus and Sthenelaidas at Sparta," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 30, no. 2 (1981).

[186] Adam Parry, *Logos and Ergon in Thucydides* (New York: Arno Press, 1981), 151.

he may be most able both in action and in speech" (319a, italics mine).[187] Compare this phrasing with how Thucydides brings Pericles on stage for his first speaking role: "Pericles—who was at that time *the foremost Athenian and the most able in speech and action*—gave the following advice" (1.139, italics mine).[188] There are several other clues which Plato gives us to suggest he is using this dialogue to critically assess Thucydides' Pericles. The dramatic date of the *Protagoras* is approximately 432, just before the Peloponnesian War, and roughly when Pericles would be making his speech to the Athenians that helped initiate hostilities.[189] However, the tone of the dialogue is far from pessimistic—indeed, R. E. Allen calls it "sun-lit"—and I believe this tone is designed to reflect the optimism of fifth-century Athens and what Paul Woodruff calls the "new learning."[190] Since Protagoras was reputed to be a close confidante and advisor of the great Athenian statesman, Plato suggests that we consider him as the spokesperson to convey numerous Periclean notions and attitudes—especially the combination of rhetoric and imperialism that presaged Athens' ultimate defeat—which Socrates will refute. Athenian ambition and bold restlessness (*polupragmosune*) will not be sufficient to defend against the resentment that her arrogant and often brutal imperialism spawned throughout Greece.[191] Plato makes this connection especially obvious by having

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[187] *Hopos ta poleos dunatotatos an eiē kai prattein kai legein*.

[188] *Legein te kai prassein dunatotatos*.

[189] Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and other Socratics*: 309-10. Plato seems to have been preoccupied with Protagoras. With respect to dramatic dates, Socrates' debate with Protagoras is one of the very first acts in Socrates' career. Conversely, Socrates' career "ends" in the frame scene from the *Theaetetus*, where a "written version" of a "narrative" given by Socrates that discusses, among other things, Protagoras' famous doctrine that "man is the measure" is read to the interlocutors (143b-c).

[190] Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato, Volume 3: Ion, Hippias Minor, Laches, Protagoras*, trans. Reginald E. Allen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 89.; Woodruff, "Rhetoric and Relativism: Protagoras and Gorgias," 290.; Woodruff, "Socrates Among the Sophists," 37.

[191] It is no accident that one of Socrates' definitions of justice in the *Republic* is *apolupragmosune*, "minding one's own business," the opposite of the virtue that Thucydides' Corinthians say identifies Athenians.

Protagoras' great speech reflect many of the themes Thucydides puts in the mouth of Pericles in the *History*, especially his famous Funeral Oration. As we shall see, both speeches articulate what I believe is Thucydides' position that the Athenians considered themselves beyond morality.

In the dialogue's frame scene, Socrates is awakened in the dark early morning hours by an uninvited Hippocrates, who is "from a great and wealthy family," and whose father, Apollodorus, shares at least the same name as the narrator of the *Symposium* (316b).[192] Hippocrates wants Socrates to introduce him to Protagoras as an excellent prospective student.[193] Before taking him to Protagoras, however, Socrates talks briefly with him and shows that Hippocrates is unable to distinguish between becoming a sophist by studying with Protagoras, and merely purchasing the product that Protagoras sells. Indeed, while Hippocrates is desperate to learn what Protagoras teaches, he confesses that he would be ashamed to become a sophist (312a-b).[194] This view cheapens the purpose of sophistry. It seems that then, as now, "most of what students have been taught about the sophists is wrong."[195] That is, sophistry implies a way of life as much as—perhaps more than—any particular teaching.[196] I believe that—in a manner similar to what we saw in the *Gorgias*—Socrates' concern with the sophists (particularly Gorgias and

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[192] Nails argues that: "Hippocrates' father, Apollodorus, cannot be the Socratic one because that Apollodorus says explicitly that he has been associating with Socrates for less than three years (Pl. *Symposium* 172c) in +/- 400, the dramatic date of the frame, whereas the dramatic date of Plato's *Protagoras* is +/- 433/2." Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and other Socratics*: 170.

[193] That is, he wants to use Socrates as an instrument to achieve his end of meeting Protagoras, just as he seeks Protagoras for instrumental means. We should note in passing that Socrates' examination of Hippocrates is his first, according to dramatic dates. As such, it deserves more scrutiny than we are able to give it here.

[194] Hippocrates says that he would be ashamed "to present [himself]…to the Greek world" as a sophist (312a-b).

[195] Woodruff, "Socrates Among the Sophists," 37.

[196] We shouldn't be terribly surprised by this, given how different some of the various sophists' teachings are. For a very brief summary of the variety of sophist teachings, see ibid.

Protagoras) is less about specific aspects of their teaching and more about the assumptions that form the soil from which their various teachings grow. As we shall see, Protagoras considers himself the first avowed sophist—thereby identifying himself as the fountainhead of the various sophist *technai* that emerge. This is why he considers himself greater than the other sophists, who teach only various skills (*technai*), but fail to convey the meaning or purpose of their activity.

Protagoras is staying at the house of Callias III, the son of Pericles' ex-wife and the son of the richest man in Athens, with a group of other famous (and younger) wise men.[197] Callias will become the richest man in Athens during the Peloponnesian War, only to have his wealth reduced to two talents in the aftermath of the conflict. Callias' ambition was to become wise by spending his wealth on sophistic education.[198] According to Socrates, Protagoras was more than happy to oblige, claiming in the *Meno* that Protagoras "made more money…than Phidias who made such notably fine works, and ten other sculptors" (91d). Protagoras was likely last in Athens in 443 when, at Pericles' behest, he developed the laws for the Pan-Hellenic colony at Thurii that received Athenian support. It would not go unnoticed by Plato's readers that, in the aftermath of the Sicilian expedition, Thurii turned against Athens to aid Syracuse. As if to reinforce this point, Protagoras' two groups of followers are each lead by one of Pericles' sons, who also serve as examples to remind us that the sons of good men don't always turn out to be good (319e-320a).

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[197] Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and other Socratics*: 68-74.
[198] Ibid., 70. *Apology* 20a.

It is significant that Pericles hired Protagoras to draft the Thurii constitution (*politeia*) and the Thurii *nomos*.[199] The traditional understanding in Ancient Greece was that a city's laws were gifts of the gods rather than made by human beings. The view that the law is given by the gods is called theonomy; the view that laws are made by humans is called anthroponomy.[200] Perhaps the most famous image of theonomy is Moses receiving the Decalogue directly from God on Mt. Sinai. While anthroponomy is the reigning view today in the United States and Western Europe, theonomy is still embraced in much of the Muslim world.[201] For example, Sharia is believed to be of divine origin. In Ancient Greece, legendary lawgivers like Lycurgus and Minos were said to have received the laws from the gods Apollo and Zeus. It was customary for lawgivers to apply to the oracle at Delphi to obtain advice and/or sanction for their new plans. Plato draws our attention to the fact that Protagoras inaugurates the anthoponomic age, through his creation of the Thurii constitution—an action justified by his famous doctrine that "man is the measure of all things."[202] It is difficult to believe that the laws are heaven-sent when they are created specifically with a view to supporting the expansionist policies of the creator's benefactor. Staying with the divine theme, Socrates compares the house of Callias to Hades, and when he and Hippocrates arrive, they discover that Protagoras has already seduced many of the Athenian elite.[203] The *Protagoras*, then, can

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[199] Victor Ehrenberg, "The Foundation of Thurii," *The American Journal of Philology* 69, no. 2 (1948). N. K. Rutter, "Diodorus and the Foundation of Thurii," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 22, no. 2 (1973).

[200] Seung, *Plato Rediscovered: Human Value and Social Order*: 7-11.

[201] Though he does not use the terms, for an interesting comparison between theonomy and anthroponomy using the U.S. Constitution as an example, see Sanford Levinson, *Constitutional Faith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

[202] Protagoras famously taught that: "A human being is measure of all things, of those things that are, that they are, and of those things that are not, that they are not" (DK I).

[203] This is further emphasized by having Callias' doorman initially slam the door in Socrates and Hippocrates faces. Like Hades, the house of Callias is guarded by a Cerberus.

be understood as Socrates' Odyssean descent into a Protagorean or anthroponomic Hades where the Athenian governing class is reduced to the moral stature of well heeled, but nevertheless slavish, animals.[204]

Pericles seems to be the model that Protagoras has in mind when he articulates his understanding of political excellence. Protagoras claims, for example, that a man can be bold without being courageous, which fits well with the criticism that, despite the way he aggressively brought Athens' "allies" to heel, Pericles was tentative in his military actions toward Sparta. Most infamously, Pericles supported, participated in, and likely proposed Athens' intervention in the war between two of her allies, Samos and Miletus, in 441. The Athenians imposed a democracy and a garrison on Samos and took Samian children and men as hostages. When the Samians resisted and sought Persian assistance, the Athenians besieged the city for nine months before reducing it to rubble and executing many of the Samian dissidents (1.115-117). In this way, Plato encourages us to read the *Protagoras* as an argument summing up the age of Pericles.[205]

Indeed, Socrates and Hippocrates discover not only the cream of the sophist crop, but also the best and brightest of the Athenian youth at Callias' house. In addition to Pericles' sons and Callias, some of the others present include: Charmides, Plato's uncle who later became one of the Thirty Tyrants; Philippides, whose family was rich from silver mining; Andron, a future member of the oligarchy of the Four Hundred; Agathon and Pausanias, who left Athens for the tyrant Archelaus' court; the "two Adeimantuses," one of whom later became a general in the war; Eryximachus; and Phaedrus. However, Plato saves the best for last, as Alcibiades and Critias enter after Socrates' arrival. These two were perhaps the most reviled politicians of their generation. Xenophon famously

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[204] See *Gorgias* 518e-519a.

[205] See Donald Kagan, *Outbreak of the Peloponnesian War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969).

describes Alcibiades and Critias in his *Memorabilia*: "Among the associates of Socrates were Critias and Alcibiades; and none wrought so many evils to the state. For Critias in the days of the oligarchy bore the palm for greed and violence; Alcibiades, for his part, exceed all in licentiousness and insolence under the democracy...ambition was the very life-blood of both."[206] Of the Athenians present, nearly all of them would be among those suspected or tried for the impiety associated with the profaning of the Mysteries and the mutilation of the Herms in 415. Plato foreshadows that, though Socrates will attempt to save them, these future Athenian leaders will, under the influence of Protagorean teachings, bring themselves and the city to ruin. They are beyond saving. As T.K. Seung puts it, "the house of Callias and his guests stand for the spiritually dead city of Athens."[207]

With this beautifully articulated framework, Socrates' purpose in the *Protagoras* is set. He must defend philosophy from sophistry by showing that they are born from different sources. In doing so, he must also try to deliver some of the young Athenian souls in Hades from Protagoras' enchanting song. It is noteworthy that Plato's casting in the *Protagoras* throws Socrates' failure to reform Athens' youth into stark relief. This raises the question of whether Socrates' failure is meant to indicate that human virtue is impossible to achieve, since, if Socrates couldn't do it, then it is unlikely that anyone else could. Rather than suggest this pessimistic conclusion, I believe that the *Protagoras* indicates how courageously Socrates tried to lead Athenians toward the good life. By dramatically dating the *Protagoras* to show Socrates' first interaction with Athenians, Plato strongly points to the fact that the damage had already occurred by the time

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[206] Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, trans. E. C. Marchant (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923), 1.2.12-14. Unless otherwise specified, all references to Xenophon are from this volume.
[207] Seung, *Plato Rediscovered: Human Value and Social Order*: 77.

Socrates arrived on the scene. Nevertheless, Socrates will have the brief but ultimately unsatisfying victory of shaming the grand old man of the Greek Enlightenment in front of the best Athenian youth. He will use his first appearance to try to recruit the Athenians to the side of virtue—thereby providing a defense of his life as well as philosophy.

Plato drives home this point by having Protagoras begin by claiming that Homer, Hesiod and other famous poets were the originators of the sophistical movement (316d-317a). Plato's Protagoras is well within his rights to make this claim. The earliest surviving use of the Greek noun *sophistes* is from Pindar, where it means "poet."[208] Unlike these men, who Protagoras claims concealed their art "out of fear of ill will," he is the first who is courageous enough to openly admit to being a sophist (317a). Given the prominent role the poets played in Greek religion, Walter Burkert argues that the sophists were responsible for "the most radical transformation of Greek religion."[209] Protagoras insists that his forbearers failed to conceal their art from "the people who had power in the cities," which was the primary purpose of their putative disguise, since "ordinary folks hardly notice anything anyway, but just sing along with the men in real power" (317a).[210] Protagoras, then, claims to have discovered a way of bringing the interests of the powerful and the wise into congruence in a way that evaded Homer and Hesiod. Presumably, he does this through mutual benefit: Protagoras helps Pericles write laws and Pericles' fame makes Protagoras rich and influential.[211] According to Protagoras, the masses do not perceive anything—they merely parrot back what their leaders say. If he is right, the masses think what they are told to think, without realizing that they are being

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[208] Woodruff, "Socrates Among the Sophists," 37.
[209] Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 296.
[210] Woodruff translation.
[211] For an account of the mutually beneficial relationship between Pericles and Protagoras see Edward Schiappa, *Protagoras and Logos: A Study in Greek Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 2nd ed. (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 176-89.

told to think it. In Athens, therefore, the *demos* believe they are free because this is what they are told by their leaders. But in 433, their leader is Pericles and I think Plato is here referring to Thucydides, who asserts that Pericles "exercised free control over the people and was not led by them instead of leading them…and what was in name a democracy became in actuality rule by the first man" (2.65). Protagoras, then, is advertising to his potential clientele an avenue to exploit the democratic masses who only appear to rule Athens, but in reality merely parrot back what they are told by those who rule them—Pericles, for instance.

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, Protagoras professes to teach "good judgment (*euboulia*) about domestic matters, so that he [Protagoras' student] may best manage his own household, and about political affairs, so that in affairs of the *polis* he may be most able both in speech and action" (319a). It is interesting that Protagoras claims to teach students how to "manage" the private matters within the household but, when it comes to public affairs, he will teach them how to "be the most capable" or "the most powerful" (*dunatotatos*).[212] It's difficult to know precisely what to make of this subtle shift. Kathryn Morgan argues that:

> it was a peculiarity of Athenian rhetorical procedure that expertise had to be hidden by dissimulation; one could not risk seeming too clever, since this might seem non-democratic. Hippokrates, then, is ashamed to say that he wants the skills that will enable him to manipulate the assembly; nor can Protagoras confess such an aim.[213]

Cast in this light, Protagoras teaches "management," though he must be very careful in how he presents it. He will use this same technique when he delivers his myth on the

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[212] One can imagine that being able to play off the ambiguity of the term *dunatotatos* here and *dunamenous* at 317a, which can mean either "capable" or "powerful," would be helpful for Protagoras. Different audiences might hear or receive his, for lack of a better word, "sales pitch" very differently.

[213] Kathryn A. Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 137.

origin of the *polis*. There, he adapts a traditional myth to the specific context of teaching excellence in the Athenian democracy. This is perhaps also why he allows Socrates to (mis)characterize his teaching as using "political knowledge" (*politike techne*) to make men "good citizens," rather than—as he himself said—the "most powerful" or "capable" (319a).

With all of this in mind, let us now return to Plato's textual allusion to Thucydides. Plato directs us to Thucydides at precisely the moment where Socrates makes his pivotal speech that sets the *political* course of the rest of the dialogue. Socrates begins by acknowledging his belief that he does not think it possible to teach political knowledge. He says that he believes "along with the rest of the Greek world, that the Athenians are wise" (319b), and supports this belief with two examples. His first example is that when an issue arises in the Assembly that its members think is "technical," they pay particular attention to the advice of experts who possess the relevant knowledge (it is no accident that the example he uses is the art which gave rise to and supports the empire—shipbuilding). However, when the issue is a political one, the Athenians think that "anyone can stand up and advise them, carpenter, blacksmith, shoemaker, merchant, ship-captain, rich man, poor man, well-born, low-born—it doesn't matter—and nobody blasts him for presuming to give counsel without any prior training under a teacher" (319d). Socrates takes this to be an admission that Athenians do not consider political knowledge teachable. Socrates' second example is his observation that "the wisest and best of our citizens are unable to transmit to others the virtues that they possess" (319e). He provides two further examples to support this claim, both of which highlight Pericles' failure to teach his own mastery of political knowledge or the political art:

> Look at Pericles, the father of these young men here. He gave them a superb education in everything that teachers can teach, but as for what he himself is really wise in, he neither teaches them that himself nor has anyone else teach them either, and his sons have to browse like stray sacred cattle and pick up virtue on their own wherever they might find it…[and] Clinias, the younger brother of Alcibiades here. When Pericles became his guardian he was afraid that he would be corrupted, no less, by Alcibiades. So he separated them and placed Clinias in Ariphron's house and tried to educate him there. Six months later he gave him back to Alcibiades because he couldn't do anything with him. (320a-b)

After saying this, Socrates challenges Protagoras to explain how virtue is teachable and puts Protagoras in a very awkward position. If Protagoras argues that political knowledge is teachable, then he will be objecting to Athenian practice.[214] As Michael Frede explains: "Democracy rests on the assumption that the affairs of a city are not the subject of some special expertise, but that every citizen is competent to judge them. To claim that a special expertise or art is needed for these matters comes dangerously close to claiming that the people are not fit to rule, for they do not have this expertise."[215] This is dangerous for a foreigner in Athens to say openly—so Protagoras needs to be able to praise Athenian wisdom while at the same time undermining Socrates' interpretation of these practices. On the other hand, if Protagoras concedes that political knowledge is not teachable or innate, then he will be revealing himself as either irrelevant or as a snake-oil salesman.[216] To succeed in showing his clientele that he can make them "mini-Pericleses," he can challenge neither Socrates' premise of the wisdom of the

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[214] Conceding this point may undermine a central presupposition of democracy in the following sense. If the *politike techne* can be taught, then one individual may have a more knowledgeable opinion on political matters than another, which cuts against Athenian democracy's premise that, on political matters, one citizen's opinion is equal to another's.

[215] Michael Frede, "Introduction," in *Plato: Protagoras* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992), xi-xii.

[216] By claiming that political wisdom is teachable—and that *he* can teach it—Protagoras also silently indicates his superiority to Pericles.

Athenians, nor the capacity of his student Pericles.[217] It is Protagoras' need for a compromise position that drives the choice and structure of his response.

Plato's deliberate echoing of Thucydides, then, occurs precisely before Socrates' speech and Protagoras' response. Any Athenian at the time, looking backward from the vantage point of everything that occurred, would recognize Socrates' questioning of the supposed wisdom of the Athenians—how the Athenian democracy makes its political decisions—as being particularly significant since he does so on the eve of the war that will bring disaster to Athens and to the men assembled. Socrates' question is comprehensive: what future can Athenian democracy possibly have if, confronted with war, its Assembly will give equal consideration to any and all speakers, and if the greatest Athenian statesman is incapable of passing on his knowledge to his progeny? In the chapters immediately before Pericles' first speech, Thucydides recounts Themistocles bold strategy of naval expansion that, under Pericles, would be responsible for the rise of the empire. It was Themistocles who had the foresight to use the unexpected fiscal surplus from the discovery of new silver mines to built the massive Athenian fleet, which made possible the Persian defeat at Salamis. He was, therefore, the initial architect of Athenian imperialism, and Thucydides uses his position in the narrative to overtly suggest the tie between the two leaders. Indeed, Pericles used the resources of the empire to make Athens the cultural and architectural capital of Greece. Indeed, at the time Socrates and Protagoras are speaking, the last stones of the Parthenon are being set, and Pericles' openness to the Greek Enlightenment encourages the greatest artists and thinkers, like Gorgias and Protagoras, to come to Athens. Both Plato and Thucydides ask us to consider whether it is the very greatness of the Themistoclean/Periclean project—

[217] Note that it is not the case that, because Protagoras has already indicated to Socrates and Hippocrates his views on the masses and the powerful few (or, in the case of Pericles, the one), that this *automatically* means that he believes Athenian practices are foolish.

including the consequences of the enlightenment—that now incite the envy and fear in others that will, as Thucydides argues, compel (*ananke*) them into war against it?

Thucydides begins the *History* by saying that he believed from its outset that the war would be greater than any that preceded it, and he identifies its cause: "For I consider the truest cause the one least openly expressed, that increasing Athenian greatness and the resulting fear among the Lacedaemonians made going to war inevitable" (1.23). Thucydides makes the first *speech* in the *History* an address by the Corcyreans to the Athenian Assembly in the summer of 433. The Corcyraeans assert that war is unavoidable: "if there is anyone among you who does not believe it is coming, his judgment is at fault, and he is not aware that in their fear of you the Lacedaemonians are ready for war" (1.33). The Corcyreans say that the summer of 433 is when the Athenians should be "confronting the war which is imminent and all but here" (1.36). After Athens elects to make a defensive alliance with Corcyra, Thucydides tells us that the Athenians did so because "they considered war with the Peloponnesians a certainty in any case" (1.44). Socrates, then, may properly be seen as *anticipating* the coming disaster in his speech on Athenian political knowledge and on their most powerful statesman. Lawrence Lampert beautifully sums up the context: "Socrates challenges the wisest man of the time on the most important political question of the time in the presence of the most promising political leader of the time [Alcibiades] on the eve of the war that will change everything."[218]

Protagoras responds by taking the conversation out of its Athenian context and begins at the beginning, with a creation myth. Thus, Protagoras begins by purporting to show a *universal* truth about humanity, rather than a particular teaching about Athens. At

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[218] Lawrence Lampert, *How Philosophy Became Socratic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 49.

the time of creation, "the gods" crafted all the species of animals from underneath the earth.[219] Before releasing them, they asked Prometheus and Epimetheus to distribute "appropriate powers and abilities" to all of the various species of animals (320d). Epimetheus begged Prometheus for the assignment, persuading Prometheus by promising that afterwards he could inspect the results. The principle behind Epimetheus' distribution was the survival of each species. So Epimetheus gave some species strength but not speed, some claws, some wings, some size, some tough skin, etc. By the time he came to humans, Epimetheus had nothing left to give them and they were left "completely unequipped" (321c).[220] Humans were "naked, unshod, unbedded, and unarmed," and it was time for all the animals to emerge from the earth into the light (321d). To fix Epimetheus's error, Prometheus stole fire and wisdom in the practical arts (*techne*) from Olympus and gave them to human beings. While this wisdom was designed to ensure the survival of the species, humans lacked the wisdom for living together in society (or in common). This "political wisdom" was exclusively in Zeus' keeping, and Prometheus "no longer had free access to the high citadel that is the house of Zeus" (321e). Unable to steal Zeus' wisdom, Prometheus snuck into the building where Athena and Hephaestus liked to practice their arts and stole *techne* and fire instead.[221]

Because humanity's gifts were of divine origin, Protagoras claims that "they alone among animals worshipped the gods, with whom they had a kind of kinship, and erected altars and sacred images" (322a-b). In his commentary on the *Protagoras*, Patrick Coby argues that Protagoras is hinting that *techne* "is the source of religion...it is what links

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[219] Interestingly, Protagoras does not specify which gods.
[220] Epithemeus' lack of wisdom begs the question of how much foresight Prometheus (literally "foresight") really has.
[221] *Techne*—a kind of wisdom—begins with theft (a kind of injustice).

man to *the god*, for it is the cause and origin of his divine portion; and the divine portion, or man's kinship with the god, is the cause of his worshipping *gods*; hence *techne* produces religion."[222] Soon afterwards, humans were speaking words and building houses, clothes, shoes, and "were nourished by food from the earth" (322b). But Protagoras notes that "there were no cities" (322b). As a result, humans started being killed by wild animals as well as by one another, because "they did not yet possess the art of politics, of which the art of war is a part" (322b). When humans attempted to gather together for survival, "they wronged each other…and so they would scatter and again be destroyed" (322b-c). Only when "our whole race" was on the verge of extinction did any of the Olympians come to the rescue (322c). To preserve humanity, Zeus sent Hermes down to earth with the virtues of shame/respect/reverence (*aidos*) and justice (*dike*), so that there could be civic order and friendship. Though Protagoras does not say this, presumably *dike* is the system of right and wrong and *aidos* provides the motivation to respect *dike*. Zeus further ordered that every human being should have a share of these two civic virtues, "for cities would never come to be if only a few possessed these" and that anyone who did not "partake of shame and justice" should be killed for being "a pestilence to the city" (322d).[223] According to C.C.W. Taylor, the myth teaches that although people at first (thanks to the gods' *techne* from Prometheus) acquired the skills necessary for existence in small groups, they did not, until Zeus dispatched Hermes,

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[222] Patrick Coby, *Socrates and the Sophistic Enlightenment: A Commentary on Plato's Protagoras* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1987), 55-56.

[223] In thinking about Protagoras' myth, the first thing that strikes us is that the real Protagoras would not likely have believed it (at least wholesale). In his *Obscurity and the Gods* (sometimes referred to as simply *On the Gods)*, he remarks that: "Concerning the gods, I am not in a position to know either that they exist or that they do not, nor can I know what they look like, for many things prevent our knowing—the subject is obscure (*adelon*) and human life is short" (DK 4). Protagoras, while apparently agnostic, nevertheless recognizes the *usefulness* or social role of religion in a human-centered world, and he uses his *theogony* to advance his humanist aims. This is why it would be quite consistent for Protagoras to invoke the Gods here—in his *mythos*—and why they disappear in his *logos*.

possess the skills necessary for living politically, in communities composed of members not related by blood.[224] *Aidos* and *dike* were distributed to all because they are necessary preconditions for political or social life. It is, according to the myth, impossible to become truly human without the appropriate share of justice and reverence/shame/respect.[225]

Sensing, perhaps, that the myth alone may not satisfy Socrates, Protagoras appends to his myth "further evidence of the universal belief that all humans have a share of justice and the rest of civic virtue" (323a).[226] Protagoras' *logos* or argument shifts the focus from the *distribution* of civic virtue to its *instruction*. Interestingly, in his myth, Protagoras describes the civic virtues as justice (*dike*) and shame/reverence/respect (*aidos*). But when he begins his *logos*, he shifts the content of civic or political virtue to be justice (*dikaiosune*) and temperance (*sophrosune*).[227] Perhaps his shift in language here is designed to shift our frame of reference from myth to *logos*—or from a divine gift to a virtue teachable by human beings. But Protagoras also says something strange about justice and "the rest of the political art"—that every sane person should at least *claim* to be just (323b-c). Protagoras further distinguishes between political virtue and virtue in the other technical arts on the basis of who and how many receive instruction. Even

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[224] See Plato, *Plato: Protagoras*, trans. C. C. W. Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 81-85.

[225] Paul Woodruff has an interesting explanation of why Protagoras adds *aidos* where *dike* would normally be sufficient: "Protagoras understands what poets have been teaching since Homer: That justice is not enough. In the *Iliad*, Agamemnon has the right to take Achilles' prize away from him—no violation of justice there. But when Agamemnon insults Achilles by taking the prize, he divides his army, with disastrous results. His failure is a failure of reverence." Paul Woodruff, *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 58. While I'm not sure if it a failure of reverence or respect, I take his point.

[226] Protagoras acknowledges his shift from *muthos* to *logos* at 324d: "On this subject, Socrates, I will abandon story for argument."

[227] He adds piety at 325a and calls this "what I may collectively term the virtue of a man." While we can only speculate, I wonder if Plato's Protagoras believes that piety is necessary as a further internal check or buttress to apply a more fearsome sanction to unjust and intemperate actions. It is also noteworthy that Protagoras omits wisdom and courage in his discussion.

though the political art is simply one art among many, it is *universally* taught. Because of its necessity for political and social life, it must be commonly held and, hence, taught by everyone to everyone.[228] In the myth, then, Zeus—the god of law and social order—represents law or *nomos* itself in the sense that a city's laws and conventions instill and perpetuate civic virtue. Protagoras believes that the need for civic virtue is a basic requirement for community or civil society, and specifies that everyone must have a share in the civic virtues of justice, temperance, and piety (342e-325a). He claims that this explains why people get angry with those who ignore civic virtues, but they do not get upset with people who have bad afflictions resulting from nature or bad luck, like physical weakness or ugliness. Protagoras takes this as proof of his claim that people think virtue is teachable.[229] The way it is taught is equally unique—*everyone* is an instructor. The teaching of virtue begins in childhood and extends into adulthood though the ministrations of parents, nurses, tutors, etc. They teach children the difference between the just and unjust, the beautiful and the ugly, and the pious and impious. It is no different, Protagoras suggests, than teaching language or writing. Everyone participates in teaching civic virtue just as they do the Greek language.[230] Protagoras' description of this education is interesting for the conditioning methodology it specifies. As soon as children understand language, their parents "fight hard" to teach their children

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[228] Protagoras says that "people…[will say] that it is madness not to pretend to justice, since one must have some trace of it or not be human" (323c).

[229] Protagoras' aside on punishment is interesting. For Protagoras, the "true significance"—and the most significant effect—of punishment is not retribution or vengeance but deterrence, for "both the wrong-doer and whoever sees him being punished" (324b-c). The implication here is similar to that of education—that political knowledge can be taught by either dispensing or observing punishment. Virtue is teachable through participation in or through the threat of punishment. His view is extraordinarily behaviorist.

[230] Plato's use of irony here is particularly rich. Protagoras was one of the first to study and analyze the Greek language and would have undoubtedly considered it a matter of expertise. Woodruff explains: "Protagoras argued that 'wrath' in the first line of the *Iliad* (a feminine noun in conventional Greek) should properly have been treated as masculine in gender…there is no doubt that Protagoras' standard [for linguistic usage] was independent of public opinion, because it promoted natural over conventional genders for words." Woodruff, "Rhetoric and Relativism: Protagoras and Gorgias," 295.

with their words and actions that "this is right and that is wrong," "this is good and that is awful," "this is pious and that is impious," and "do this, don't do that" (325d). If a child does not obey of his own accord, "teachers" will "straighten him out with threats and blows as if he were a twisted, bent piece of wood" (325d). More advanced instructional techniques include: rote memorization, imitation, and physical education. When it comes to music, Protagoras says that the teachers will "drill the rhythms and scales into the children's souls, so that they become gentler" (326b).[231] Adult education is primarily the task of the laws:

> And when they [young adults] quit school, the city in turn compels them to learn the laws and to model their lives on them. They are not to act as they please…the city has drawn up laws invented by the great lawgivers in the past and compels them to govern and be governed by them. She punishes anyone who goes beyond these laws, and the term for this punishment in your city and other is, because it is a corrective legal action, "correction." (326d)

By this account, it is difficult to see how this "education" will produce political knowledge or wisdom; habituation or compliance seem like more natural outcomes. Colby remarks that: "By repeating six times the word *anankazo* (to force, compel) Protagoras leaves little doubt that compulsion is the salient feature of this kind of education and that moral habituation, therefore, is its principal result."[232] Based on his account, Protagoras believes that civic virtue must be backed by the threat of violence, but that this is necessary because civic virtue and justice are in the common good and "to our advantage" (327b). Protagoras understands virtue and the common good in terms of the mutual advantage and serviceability of community members. Protagoras says that this explains why the sons of good fathers do not always possess their fathers' good

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[231] While we might wonder about this account constituting the whole of what "education" requires, anyone who has attended a middle school band recital will likely appreciate Protagoras' last suggestion.
[232] Coby, *Socrates and the Sophistic Enlightenment: A Commentary on Plato's Protagoras*: 64.

attributes. However, instead of proving that virtue is not teachable, Protagoras claims the reverse. Since everyone is a teacher of political virtue, Protagoras says that the sons of good fathers have no particular advantage when it comes to learning civic virtue. Unlike, say, flute playing, where parents of the rich could buy the best instruction for their children, and the children of the poor would receive no instruction at all, *everyone* receives an education in political virtue. That the sons of good fathers don't always amount to anything is, on this understanding, wholly unremarkable—it merely reflects a difference in "natural disposition" (327c). However, Protagoras also admits that the most able, i.e., the richest, "start going to school at the earliest age and quit at the latest age" (326c-d). If this is the case, then it is also the case that the failure of the sons of good fathers to learn civic virtue must be *at least somewhat* attributable to their fathers' inability to teach or their sons' inability to learn.

As it turns out, then, the ability to instruct *is* relevant to inculcating political virtue in individuals. Unsurprisingly, Protagoras describes himself as "uniquely qualified to assist others in becoming noble and good" because he is "the least bit more advanced in virtue" (328a-b). He promises to teach the young Athenian elite present that by following his teaching they may become worthy leaders of what Pericles, Protagoras' star pupil calls the "school of Hellas." Protagoras will teach them how to teach civic virtue to their subjects. Plato seems, then, to question what Thucydides' Pericles suggests—that the Periclean combination of optimistic rhetoric and opportunistic practice left Athens ill prepared for the great struggle with Sparta. Filled with exaggerated notions of their destiny to rule, many ambitious young Athenians felt that the virtues of boldness and innovation would be sufficient to withstand the enormous resentment that their arrogant imperialism generated throughout Greece. The great speech of Protagoras echoes

Pericles' Funeral Oration; both speeches support Thucydides' suggestion that the Athenians believed themselves to be beyond morality. *They* were the measure of virtue.

Plato again directs us to look to Thucydides' Pericles. After Protagoras' great speech, Socrates says: "you could hear a speech similar to this from Pericles or some other competent orator if you happened to be present when one of them was speaking on this subject" (329a). As it happens, in perhaps the most famous speech from the *History*, Thucydides recounts a funeral oration given by Pericles that gives an account of Athenian exceptionalism or virtue.[233] It is a paean to a conception of Athens and Athenian imperialism that is remarkable for the way Pericles *idealizes* the *polis*. And we should not be surprised that Plato directs us to Pericles, for he claims to teach just like his mentor. In this oration, he calls Athens herself a "school" or "education for Hellas" (*paideusis Hellados*), and that education produces individuals "self-sufficient for the most varied forms of conduct, and with the most attractive qualities" (2.41). More significantly for our purposes, he describes his oration as a "lesson" (*didaskalia*) or an example of what Athens teaches (2.42).[234] As Michael Palmer points out, the Funeral Oration is the only significant speech in Thucydides' narrative that does not urge its audience to political action; rather, it exhorts its audience to a political *understanding*. For this reason, the Funeral Oration is important not because of any actions resulting

[233] The Funeral Oration is not, in my view, a theoretical defense of democracy. It is, rather, a speech in praise *of Athens*. Athenagoras' speech in reply to Hermocrates is the most sustained defense of democracy in the *History* (6.36-40).

[234] Liddell, Scott and Jones use this very passage in their definition of *didaskalia*, and render it: "serve as a lesson." Lattimore and Woodruff translate *didaskalia* differently than I do here. Lattimore renders it "to explain" and Woodruff "to show." By rendering *didaskalia* in this way, Woodruff's translation nicely brings out the sense of Pericles' address as a dramatic performance—which is another common use of the term. From this vantage point, Pericles' claim that Athens is an instructional "show" for the rest of the Greek world is particularly ironic in light of the remainder of Thucydides' *History*. Liddell et al., "A Greek-English Lexicon," s.v. "didaskalia".

from it, but because of the understanding of political or civic virtue that it attempts to inculcate. Let us examine the famous speech.

Thucydides briefly sets the stage by describing the public funeral ceremony for those slain during the first year of the war and remarking that this rite was a custom from ancient Athens. Pericles' speech occurs very early in the war. In the winter immediately following the Athenian abandonment and subsequent Spartan ravaging of the Attic plain, Athens held a state funeral for the individuals who died in the war's early skirmishes. Following their ancestors' wont, war dead were buried in a designated section of the city (with the notable exception of those killed at Marathon who, because of their outstanding virtue, were buried on the battlefield). Thucydides informs us that Pericles was chosen to deliver this first funeral oration due to his exceptional intelligence and renown (2.34). Pericles begins his speech by explicitly challenging tradition. Rather than praising the lawgiver who established the oration as part of the funeral assembly, Pericles reproaches him (2.35). Just as one of the first things Plato's Protagoras, the wisest man in Greece, does is to criticize his ancestors—the early "sophists" that included Homer and Hesiod—the very first thing that the most famous and intelligent Athenian does is to criticize his predecessors. Why might Pericles do this? Palmer suggests an answer: "Pericles regards himself as wiser than the laws and the ancestors who made them; he will nevertheless render obedience to the laws and endeavor, to the best of his ability, to satisfy the wishes and opinions of everyone in his audience."[235] As we've seen, Pericles reason for doing so is remarkably similar to Protagoras'. Pericles also draws our attention to the contrast between the ideal presented in his speech and the reality of the deeds of Athenians and of

[235] Michael Palmer, *Love of Glory and the Common Good: Aspects of the Political Thought of Thucydides* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992), 22. Jeffry Ruston makes a similar point, noting that Pericles subordinates "all these themes to the glorification of *contemporary* Athens itself." Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War, Book II*, ed. Jeffrey S. Rusten (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1989), 136.

the city herself: "I myself would have thought it sufficient that the honors for those who proved good in deed be bestowed by deed as well…rather than that the virtues of many men depend for their credibility on whether a single man speaks well or badly" (2.35). Ober argues that "by pointing out that his *logos* [speech] is not an *ergon* [deed] Thucydides' Pericles alerts his audience to the element of idealization in his portrait of Athens."[236]

Pericles continues with his ancestral theme: "I will begin with our ancestors, since it is right and also appropriate on such an occasion as the present that the honor of this remembrance should be given to them" (2.36). Pericles begins his oration by honoring the ancestors who, "occupying the land through the succession of generations…handed it down in freedom until the present time" (2.36). However, Pericles praises the generation of "our fathers" even more for not merely "occupying" their land, but adding to it—that is, for acquiring the empire. Following this logic, the present generation merits the most praise because it has enlarged the empire, giving Athens the resources that make her self-sufficient in matters of war and peace. While Pericles does in fact praise his ancestors, he deems them less praiseworthy than the immediately preceding generation, who were themselves less exemplary than those of Pericles' generation. If the city fathers deserve praise for acquiring the empire and Pericles' generation deserves praise for adding to it, what must the forthcoming generations do to merit such honors? The logic of Pericles' account is that—when it comes to being praiseworthy—future generations will be required to unleash an appetitive, acquiring spirit sufficient to further Athenian domination. Pericles seems unaware of any limits or diminishing returns implied by his account.

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[236] Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule*: 84-85.

Pericles' next move is surprising. He will not detail the actions (presumably violent ones) that gave rise to Athens' standing and repute. Instead, he says that he will describe the "principles by which we came into this position and the form of government from which its greatness resulted" (2.36). Only after this will he praise the dead. Adam Parry is, as usual, insightful here, explaining that Pericles' move to principles allows him to give "a sustained and realized attitude of the mind, expressing itself in a manner of living, in daily practices, in laws both written and unwritten, and in essential, native courage. And it finds its being not in actuality, but in the minds of men."[237] Pericles argues that the goodness of individual Athenians is inextricably linked to the Athenian regime and way of life. He notes that though Athens is called a democracy because it is governed by the many, not the few, and because all men are considered equal before the law in private disputes, men only receive honors in proportion to the virtue they exhibit. In Athens, democratic equality is understood to be equality of opportunity rather than equality of outcome. The Athenian *polis* does not place limits on men's virtue—nature herself is the only thing that constrains Athenian men.[238] According to Pericles, then, Athens is especially great because it recognizes and even celebrates natural inequality. While Athens is administered by the many, the best men still rule her. Pericles adds that Athenians are tolerant in both public and private life (unlike Sparta, where coercive discipline is the means for bringing about civic virtue). Yet, though they are tolerant, this does not mean that they are lawless—Athenians still fear authority.

Athenians are superior to others in education and military training. According to Pericles, they are superior because they love the beautiful or noble without extravagance, and love knowledge but are not made weak because of it. As for wealth—Athenians use

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[237] Parry, *Logos and Ergon in Thucydides*: 160.
[238] Pericles is gender-specific.

it for "opportune action" rather than "boastful speech" (2.40). Athenians are politically active and astute, respect public service, and are unique among cities because they consider those who "take no part in these to be not apolitical but useless" (2.40). What's more, Athenian men are daring and calculating thinkers, deciding things for themselves, and, in so doing, consider "instruction by speech" essential for bringing about the best actions. Unlike others whose daring results from their ignorance, Athenian daring results from thought. Thus, Athenian daring is doubly impressive because it combines courage with a full understanding of the risks and dangers involved in actions. Furthermore, no one surpasses Athenian virtue because Athenians make friends not by receiving favors, but by doing them. This, according to Pericles, makes Athenians firmer friends. Those who give are more faithful friends than those who receive because receivers know that any favors they grant in return will be considered payment of a debt rather than a gift of kindness. Athenian friendship, says Pericles, does not spring from "calculation of advantage" (2.40). Here, Pericles hints at the relationship between Athenian liberality and the empire: "We are unique in being benefactors not out of calculation of advantage but with the fearless confidence of our freedom" (2.40). According to Pericles, Athens was neither compelled to create the empire nor did she do so out of interest. If we flip this around, Pericles appears to argue that the source of the Athenian allies' resentment is the burden of their gratitude. Since they are debtors, they cannot hope to benefit Athens as much as Athens benefits them. This is not to say, as Jacqueline de Romilly does, that Pericles is admitting here that the empire is unjust.[239] Rather, the ends of the empire are simply Athenian ends, not those of her allies. The empire is an extension of the city, created for the city's benefit.

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[239] Romilly, *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism*: 138-39. It does, as we saw in the Melian Dialogue, make a genuine common good problematic.

Pericles continues, arguing that Athens allows the complete flourishing of each individual. Athens is the school of Greece, and every Athenian is himself sufficient and versatile enough to adapt to any circumstance requiring action. Evidence of this self-sufficiency is seen in the fact that Athens' power was brought into being precisely because her citizens lived in this manner. Of all cities, only Athens is superior in actions than in speech. Because of this, there is no shame in being defeated by her and, in fact, no enemy is indignant following an Athenian victory because there is no shame in being defeated by the best. Similarly, no subject complains that the Athenians are unworthy rulers. It is important to note that, for Pericles, Athenian power testifies to her virtue: unlike other rulers, Athens *deserves* to rule. Athens is so beautiful, great and powerful, says Pericles, that she does not need any poet—even Homer—to sing her praises. The reality of Athens needs no embellishing: her accomplishments—or at least the memory of them—will serve as everlasting monuments to her greatness.

Up to this point, Pericles has discussed the self-sufficiency of individual Athenians and the immortality of Athenian imperialism. Yet, for Pericles' portrait to be true, Athens' empire must be continual and universal, as generation upon generation of Athenians seek to increase it. If civic power is the vehicle through which individual virtue is obtained, then Athens must perpetually be at war. And, since the Athenian empire is not yet universal, it must continue to be expanded. Perhaps this is why Pericles concludes his praise of Athens by demanding that those who still live be prepared to make a similar sacrifice.

Having finished his praise of the city and the Athenian regime, Pericles turns his attention to the dead, remarking that "the most important part of the eulogy has been said. For it is their virtues, and those of men like them, that have given honor to the qualities I have praised in the city" (2.42). However, what Pericles *actually* says about the dead is

that for some of them "who were worse in other ways it is right that first place be given to valor against enemies on behalf of country; by effacing evil with good, they became public benefactors rather than individual malefactors" (2.42). Pericles extols the fallen because they chose vengeance on their enemies over personal wealth or the prospect of future enjoyments. As Pericles puts it: "recognizing that it meant resisting and dying rather than surviving by submission, they fled disgrace in word but stood up to the deed with their lives and through the fortune of the briefest critical moment, at the height of glory rather than fear, departed" (2.42). Thus, according to Pericles, the dead are notable because they preferred honor to wealth—even the hope or prospect of future wealth. It is no accident that the requirements of personal honor and Athenian honor are one and the same: Pericles harmonizes the tension between private interests and the public good. Specifically, death in battle—in service of Athens—is an individual's *gain* rather than a loss. This is so because there is no greater glory than dying in battle, and glory is something far more valuable than wealth or personal safety—in no small part because it is more dependable than these things. This raises the following question: while it is obviously good for the city to have its citizens be willing to sacrifice themselves when necessary, how is it that, for an individual, the glory that arises from death while serving the city becomes the greatest of all goods?

According to Pericles, the mechanism through which the private and the public become identical is love (*eros*). Pericles calls upon Athenians to wonder "at the city's power as you actually see it each day and becoming her lovers, reflecting whenever her fame appears great to you" (2.43). The word Pericles uses here, *erastes*, means "lovers" in sense of erotic desire.[240] As Clifford Orwin describes it, Pericles "presents the city as

[240] Lattimore notes Thucydides' startling choice of words: "'lover' is overtly sexual and denotes the aggressor in relationships, so that Athens (whose power has just been mentioned) becomes a passive

satisfying the deepest yearnings of the citizen…[and] would transpose to the public sphere that which is most intensely private."[241] Moreover, for Pericles, it is not simply collective sacrifice in order to preserve the city—a kind of Hobbesianism—rather, glory is in fact the greatest good for individuals. The city is the vehicle through which the best kind of glory—eternal or remembered glory—can be obtained. Thus, there is no conflict for the citizen between private interest and public good—the two are functionally indistinguishable.[242] Pericles' position seems to be that there are no bounds to Athenian power—and, therefore, her empire. He remarks that "we have compelled every sea and land to become open to our daring and populated every region with lasting monuments of our acts of harm and good" (2.41). Pericles does not mention any restraints or discuss the need of temperance, self-discipline or self-rule—there are no checks or balances to Athenian *pleonexia*. Pericles announces the totality of his conception of empire:

> For in giving their lives in common cause, they individually gained imperishable praise and the most distinctive tomb, not the one where they are buried but the one where on every occasion for word and deed their glory is left after them eternally. The whole earth is the tomb of famous men, and not only inscriptions set up in their own country mark it but even in foreign lands an unwritten memorial, present not in monument but in mind, abides within each man. Emulate them now….(2.43)

Given the traditional understanding that tombs mark homeland and citizenship—the very reason that Thucydides points out the exception for the fallen at Marathon—Pericles here suggests that the "whole earth" belongs to the Athenians, if only they will

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object." It is indeed unclear whether Pericles wants the Athenians to love Athens or her power. Perhaps for Pericles the two are indistinguishable.

[241] Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides*: 23.

[242] Palmer correctly points out the odd fact that, if it is the case that every Athenian killed in battle will win eternal glory, Pericles doesn't name even one of the dead in his oration. Indeed, the relatively small losses makes the eulogized anonymity even more conspicuous. Perhaps this suggests that what the Athenians really want is *individual* glory, which more difficult to come by if they subjugate themselves to the city. Whether the Athenians (or anyone, for that matter) can, strictly speaking, love power is debatable. It may be that the Athenians instead love what *flows* from their power and that defending their empire is the only way to ensure the virtue of every Athenian.

take it. The *polis* is, then, wherever the Athenians happen to be. Socrates' criticism of Pericles in the *Gorgias* and *Protagoras* is, therefore, wholly unsurprising from this vantage point. But even on Pericles' own terms, can his idea of the *polis* work? Can glory and shame really overcome people's attachment to the physical, the private, and the traditional? Is it possible for people to care more about glory than, say, safety or wealth? In his Funeral Oration, Thucydides has Pericles articulate an understanding of Athens that, while incredibly imaginative, is a comprehensive challenge to the traditional Athenian value of temperance. It is no accident that Thucydides never uses the Greek word for temperance (*sophrosune*) or any related word to describe Pericles (or any of the Athenians), nor does he allow Pericles to use the word in any of his speeches.[243]

Thucydides uses his narrative to question Pericles' imagined *polis* by placing his account of the devastating plague that ravages Athens in the chapter immediately following the Funeral Oration. The juxtaposition suggests that Pericles may be foolish in encouraging the Athenians to unbridle their greed and make the whole world their *polis*. Right after Pericles closes his mouth, his city becomes sick. The physical, real *polis*, it seems, demands more attention and respect than Pericles wants to bestow. As opposed to the handful of dead over whom the oration is spoken, several thousand die from the plague, and, in striking contrast, many of these dead go unburied or without proper funeral rites, and certainly without a glorious oration spoken over them.[244] Thucydides tells us that the "most terrible" thing the plague brought about was not the disease itself. Rather, it was "the despair when someone realized he was sick (for immediately forming

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[243] Lowell Edmunds, "Thucydides' Ethics as Reflected in the Description of Stasis (3.82-83)," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 79(1975): 76.

[244] Palmer suggests that: "Having presented Pericles' Funeral Oration, in his account of the plague, Thucydides, we might say, presents his own…we might say that what Pericles' Funeral Oration and strategic policy do to ancestral Athens prepares the way for what the plague does." Palmer, *Love of Glory and the Common Good: Aspects of the Political Thought of Thucydides*: 30-31.

the judgment that there was no hope, they tended much more to give themselves up instead of holding out), and the fact that from tending one another they died like a flock of sheep" (2.51). And the ideal or imaginary Periclean hope that honor or glory would trump safety or advantage to become the *summum bonum* was dashed on the pallets of the sick, since it was these very individuals who were killed by the disease:

> If they were unwilling, in their fear, to approach one another, they perished in isolation, and many homes were emptied for want of someone to give care; if they drew near, they were destroyed, especially those making some claim to virtue. For out of honor, they did not spare themselves in visiting friends, since even relatives, overcome by the prevailing misery, finally grew tired of the lamentations of the dying. (2.51)

As with the Corcyraean *stasis*, the capriciousness of death brought about by the plague "was the starting point for greater lawlessness in the city" (2.53). A bold selfishness began to take hold, and traditional restraints on behavior dissolved. Thucydides' description is worth quoting in full:

> For, as the rich suddenly died and men previously worth nothing took over their estates, people saw before their eyes such quick reversals that they dared to do freely things they would have hidden before—things they never would have admitted they did for pleasure. And so, because they thought their lives and their property were equally ephemeral, they justified seeking quick satisfaction in easy pleasures. As for doing what had been considered noble, no one was eager to take any further pains for this, because they thought it uncertain whether they should die or not before they achieved it. But the pleasure of the moment, and whatever contributed to that, were set up as standards of nobility and usefulness. No one was held back in awe, either by fear of the gods or by the laws of men: not by the gods, because men concluded it was all the same whether they worshipped or not, seeing that they all perished alike; and not by the laws, because no one expected to live till he was tried and punished for his crimes. (2.53)[245]

The idealistic erotic or love relationship Pericles encourages the Athenians to have with their city cannot withstand the limits of the real flesh and blood of the world. Through

[245] Woodruff translation.

his account of the plague, Thucydides shows the fragility of the civil society and the weakness of political solutions that ignore or pretend to ignore it. For Thucydides, Pericles' city in speech is akin to Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* in that it is a "no-place." Except that, unlike More, Pericles convinced the Athenians to embrace his—with disastrous consequences. Like Plato, Thucydides encourages us to rethink the ideology of Athenian imperialism, but for different reasons. Whereas Thucydides believes that Pericles has too high a view of human nature, Plato (as we have seen) believes that Pericles' *summum bonum* is vastly too low. Thucydides argues that if people are not forced to care about the common good, then they likely will not—or at least will not do so very reliably. If we are correct that the *Protagoras* is Plato's critique of the Periclean Age as a whole, then Pericles' last speech contains useful insight into the content and force of Plato's analysis. Let us briefly examine Pericles' final argument to the Athenians.

Pericles delivers his last speech in the *History* after the plague ebbs and after Sparta ravaged the Attic plain for a second time. Thucydides says that the confluence of these two disasters caused the Athenians to undergo a "change in their attitude, and they blamed Pericles as the one who persuaded them to go to war, and they had fallen into misfortunes because of him" (2.59). As a result, they sent ambassadors to Sparta to sue for peace, who returned empty handed. The Athenians' "minds…[were] reduced to despair on every account, [and] they railed against Pericles" (2.59). As a result, Pericles called an assembly to encourage and calm them. Pericles' advice changes somewhat in his final address. To give the Athenians hope, he suggests to them that they have an advantage over the Spartans that they had thought of before and which he has not mentioned in any of his speeches. Indeed, he says that the only reason he shares it with them now is because they are unreasonably discouraged.

> You believe that you rule only over the allies, but I declare that of two realms available for use, land and sea, you are completely in control of one in its entirety, both as far as you occupy it now and as much farther as you wish. And there is no one, neither king nor any other people in existence, to prevent you from sailing with the naval forces you have at your disposal. Now then, the manifestation of this power is not related to the use of your houses and land, whose loss you consider serious; nor is it reasonable to be angry on their account, but rather to deprecate them by thinking of the latter as a garden and the former as ornaments of your wealth in comparison to this power. (2.62)

Pericles claims that the Athenians are already "masters" of one half of the world.[246] The Athenians are mistaken to think that their rule is restricted to only their allies. They are currently "complete masters" of all territory subject to sea power. Compared with this, their houses and land are worth nothing, because it is their naval power that will preserve their freedom and, in the long run, their houses and land. Furthermore, Pericles maintains his insistence that the Athenians can have "as much as you use now, and more if you want" (2.62).[247] For Pericles, all parts of the existing empire are of equal worth, and (once things settle down), they can have or take more—they are not to be bound by anything other than the vastness of the sea. This view is consistent with the account of the pleonectic Athenian *ethos* given by the Corinthians at the Congress at Sparta, where in the attempt to persuade the Spartans to fight, they charge them with ignorance about the Athenians:

> Any failure to carry out what they plan they regard as a deprivation of their own property, and anything they set out after and achieve, as a small actual accomplishment compared with what remains to be done. And if they do fail in some attempt, they fill the need by their hopes of new alternatives. For they alone possess and hope as a single undertaking, on account of their speed in acting on their resolutions. In hardship and danger they toil throughout their lives for such ends, and least enjoy what they have on account of always acquiring and thinking that there is no holiday except in doing what the occasion demands, and that leisure without accomplishment is more of a misfortune than burdensome activity.

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[246] Presumably, if he knew the Earth was composed of seventy percent water, Pericles would have rounded up.
[247] Woodruff translation.

> And so, if someone were to sum them up by saying that they were born to have no peace themselves and allow it to no one else, he would be right. (1.70)

The *outcome* of Pericles' wish in his first speech—that if he thought he could persuade the Athenians, he would have told them "to go out and lay waste" to their own property—has now come to pass: their houses and fields are destroyed (1.44). Pericles' advice, however, is the same—*pleonexia* is the solution to Athens' problem and, moreover, is his way of harmonizing the public and private good.[248] As in the Funeral Oration, Pericles appeals to the Athenians' sense of honor to ground the pleonectic drive. But here, in his final speech, Pericles ties this honor of ruling an empire to fear and security. He says that, "you have reason…to support the dignity our city derives from her empire, in which you all take pride; you should not decline the trouble, unless you cease to pursue the honor, of empire" (2.63). Losing the empire, however, will bring with it the former allies' anger for the ruthlessness of Athenian imperialism. Pericles warns that the Athenians cannot relinquish their empire even if they wished: "You see, your empire is really like a tyranny—though it may have been thought unjust to seize, it is now unsafe to surrender" (2.63).[249] Doing so will only lead to Athens' quick destruction. There are only two choices—empire and freedom, or slavery by the "envy and hatred" of the Greeks they ruled. We can see, therefore, that the Athenian acceptance of Pericles' ideal *polis*, and the *pleonexia* that supports it, leads directly to the argument of the Athenian Ambassadors at Melos.

Pericles last speech, then, encourages the Athenians to adopt the idea that "they hadn't yet thought of" and of which Pericles had not previous spoken—an *endless*

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[248] Pericles does seem to recognize a prudential need to restrain Athenian *pleonexia* until the Spartans have decided that the war is unwinnable. Perhaps he believes so fervently in the power of imagination that he thinks it possible for the Athenians to briefly shift their pleonectic desires into their imaginations during the time it takes for the Spartans to give up the fight.

[249] Woodruff translation.

expansion of imperialism and *pleonexia*. As Pericles exits the scene, Thucydides gives him a brief epitaph that details how, in his absence, the Athenians fail to hold onto his imaginative understanding of the *polis* and its respective military policy. Many commentators understand Thucydides' presentation of Pericles to be one of endorsement. For example, Jacqueline de Romilly argues that Thucydides considers Pericles' imperialist ideal both sound and productive (though undermined by his incompetent successors).[250] Lowell Edmunds argues that, for Thucydides, Pericles embodies political intelligence.[251] Josiah Ober suggests that Thucydides considered Pericles skillful enough to keep the structural problems with Athenian democracy under wraps.[252] None of these accounts takes seriously enough the idea that Thucydides considers Pericles' intelligence and imagination—his philosophy as it were—as containing the virus that would eventually destroy Athens. I believe that this is because most commentators pay insufficient attention to the way Thucydides argues—through his arrangement of the narrative, the juxtaposition of speeches, his use of patterns, and his infrequent authorial opinions.[253] While Thucydides does hint that, had Pericles lived, the Athenians might have been able to win the war,[254] he also raises the question of whether Pericles' radical

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[250] Romilly, *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism*.

[251] Edmunds, *Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides*.

[252] Josiah Ober, "Thucydides *Theoretikos*/Thucydides *Histor*: Realist Theory and the Challenge of History," in *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Thucydides*, ed. Jeffrey S. Rusten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[253] As Brian Bosworth observes in the literature on the Melian Dialogue: "the most frequent error in the [Thucydides] literature is…disregard of context." Brian Bosworth, "The Humanitarian Aspect of the Melian Dialogue," in *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Thucydides*, ed. Jeffrey S. Rusten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 314.

[254] "After their debacle in Sicily, when they lost most of their navy along with the rest of the expedition, and the city was divided by civil strife, they still held out eight years against their original enemies, who were now allied with the Sicilians, against most of their own rebellious allies besides, and also eventually against Cyrus, the son of the King of Persia, who took part with, and sent money to the Peloponnesians to maintain their fleet. And they never gave in until they had brought about their own downfall through private quarrels. So Pericles had more than enough reasons to predict that the city might easily outlast the Peloponnesians in this war" (2.65, Woodruff translation).

reimagining of the traditional, conventional attitudes of the *polis* was an act of hubris that set Athens' destruction in motion. Specifically, he raises the question of whether Pericles overestimated his capacity to control the Athenians and overlooked the centrality of his own role to his strategy's success. This is more than merely poor succession management practices—Thucydides seems to argue that Pericles' view was so imaginative and un-moored from traditional understandings that *no one* could replace him. Indeed, Thucydides tells us that it did not take long for things to unravel after Pericles' death:

> [After Pericles, the Athenians] managed all these affairs in the opposite way, and in accordance with personal ambition and personal gain they pursued other policies that seemed unrelated to the war, to the detriment of both themselves and the allies, since, when these succeeded, they brought honor and benefit more to individuals but, when they failed, they did damage to the city regarding the war. (2.65)[255]

Thucydides, then, raises the question of Pericles' culpability for the eventual Athenian defeat. Let us not forget that in Book VIII Thucydides will, in his own voice, argue that the best Athenian regime during his lifetime was the Five Thousand, which consisted of everyone who could afford a suit of hoplite armor, and "which first lifted the city out of the terrible…condition of its affairs" (8.97). His reason for this is that the Five Thousand was "a moderate blending between the few and the many" (8.97). Since Thucydides also lived during Pericles' rule, this means that he considered it superior to the "democracy" under Pericles. Yet, even this "moderate" government reveals the Athenians' underlying pleonectic addiction. Thucydides tells us that they only voted the Five Thousand into power because they lost the nearby island of Euboea, where they kept their cattle during the war. They viewed this loss as more calamitous than the loss of

[255] Periclean readings of Thucydides, in my view, take this passage the wrong way, believing it to be Thucydides' lionization of Pericles.

their army and fleet in Sicily (8.96). Thus, Thucydides implies that extreme fear and duress are the only ways to moderate Athenian desire. Pericles' reconceptualization of the city required a re-education program that only he could manage. Thucydides' narrative juxtaposition of Pericles' Funeral Oration and the plague suggest that Pericles' ideas and policies were too immoderate when faced with the brute realities brought on by the war. He failed to appreciate how important traditionally shared beliefs are to ensuring civic harmony. If we understand Pericles' teaching as representing *the* Athenian political education, to what extent is the rapid collapse of Athenian political life a result of this instruction? Furthermore, if we think of Alcibiades—Pericles' ward and participant in the *Protagoras*—as the heir and culmination of Pericles' (and, for Plato, Protagoras') instruction, we can see that what the "school of Hellas" taught was *pleonexia* and its political extension, tyranny.

During the Peace of Nicias between Athens and Sparta, Alcibiades advanced Athenian interests by tricking Nicias and the Spartans and forming an alliance with Argos, Sparta's enemy. Thucydides tells us that he was motivated to make the alliance in large part out of personal ambition and jealousy that the peace with the Spartans was made by his rival Nicias (5.43). Even the most pious and tradition-minded Athenian was not immune to Pericles' teaching, for Nicias' motives were equally personal—he wanted to secure his own reputation by preserving the peace that carried his name. From a strategic standpoint, Alcibiades' move was brilliant—Sparta and Argos end up risking both of their armies in a decisive battle at Mantinea. Were the Spartans to have lost, Athens' enemy would have been destroyed and she would essentially rule Greece without risking anything. However, Thucydides draws our attention to the fact that, for both Alcibiades and Nicias, it is personal interest rather than moderation that drives their decision-making. Consider the remainder of Alcibiades' life; he became the foremost

advocate for the Sicilian Expedition. Just before the fleet sailed, a great many religious statues (herms) were vandalized. This sacrilege was an ominous omen to the Athenians. Alcibiades was suspected of participating in this act. Instead of standing trial in Athens, he fled to Sparta where he gave the Spartans advice that helped them defeat the Athenians at Sicily. He compounded his treason by advising the Spartans to establish a fort at Decelea, on Athens' doorstep, which Thucydides says was "foremost in damaging their [the Athenians'] affairs" (7.27). Alcibiades was later forced to flee from Sparta after seducing the wife of one of the Spartan kings. He then turned on the Spartans, successfully obtaining Persian support for the Athenians.

This, then, is what Pericles' teaching unleashes, and it had disastrous consequences for Athens. In Sicily, for example, nearly the entire Athenian fleet was destroyed, and most of the army was slaughtered. The approximately 7,000 troops who surrendered were imprisoned in the Syracusan stone quarries and left to die of starvation and disease. Thucydides' description of the suffering is harrowing:

> The Syracusans treated the men in the quarries harshly…For since there were many in a deep and narrow space, the sun and the suffocating heat were still distressing them at first, and the contrasting autumnal nights that ensued weakened their condition by the change, and since they had to do everything in the same space because of close confines, and furthermore the corpses were piled together on one another, dead from wounds and because of the change and so forth, there were unbearable smells, and at the same time they were afflicted with hunger and thirst…and of all the other miseries men thrust into such a place were likely to suffer there was not one that they did not encounter. (7.87)

The externally directed *pleonexia* that Pericles preaches in final speech becomes internally directed in the next generation. Thucydides' narrative suggests that Pericles' teaching is perhaps a beautiful and imaginative *logos*, but it becomes self-defeating in the world of deeds (*ergon*).

We can now begin to see why Plato directs our attention to Thucydides' Pericles. Thucydides shows the folly of Pericles' and Protagoras' conception of virtue embodied in their respective teachings. "Man is the measure" tends to lead to an ethos of *pleonexia* and tyranny. To undermine this, Plato must replace it with an account of virtue with an *external* evaluative standard. Man cannot simply be the measure—the standard must transcend Protagoras' weak relativism that permits Pericles' love of glory to stand as a moral principle. Returning to the dialogue, Protagoras' *muthos* and *logos* show that: (1) there is a natural difference in human beings' dispositions and capabilities for virtue, (2) that virtue is acquired through instruction, (3) instruction in virtue is done by every citizen (and, hence, does not require any particular expertise), and (4) teaching virtue consists primarily of conditioning through observation, practice, and discipline. Socrates' immediate response to Protagoras' myth and argument seems at first peculiar in that it appears to ignore the larger point of Protagoras' great speech. Socrates notes that Protagoras discusses a variety of different virtues and asks whether the virtues Protagoras has mentioned are one thing or different things. Protagoras claims that they are indeed one thing, but that they represent different parts of the larger whole. Socrates then asks him if the different parts are akin to the parts of the face (e.g., nose, mouth, eyes, ears) or whether they are more like parts of gold. Protagoras answers that each of the parts is different or unique but together they comprise the larger concept of virtue. In contrast to Protagoras' view, Socrates will argue for the unity of the virtues—specifically, that all the conventionally understood virtues are nothing other than knowledge or wisdom.

Socrates argument runs along the following lines. He begins by asking Protagoras whether he accepts the proposition that justice and piety are identical. Despite

his misgivings, Protagoras agrees.[256] His agreement is interesting because Socrates' argument here is that the various virtues cannot simultaneously be both themselves and their opposites (331a). This is odd because this position is a logical extension of the situational relativism that Protagoras has previously maintained. Indeed, this ends up being all Socrates needs to force Protagoras to abandon his earlier position and state that the goodness or badness of a thing is a product of context or necessity, which is to say convention or *nomos*. Socrates then moves from piety to temperance and, after a long argument, gets Protagoras to agree that these are also the same. Socrates then attempts to show that wisdom and temperance are the same thing since, if he can establish this, he will be able to claim the unity of justice, temperance, piety, and wisdom.

At this point, Protagoras gets irritated and refuses to curb the length of his responses. His rationale is worth pausing over: "Socrates, I have had verbal contests with many people, and if I were to accede to your request and do as my opponent demanded, I would not be thought superior to anyone, nor would Protagoras be a name to be reckoned with among the Greeks" (335a). Though not an Athenian himself, Protagoras is now *behaving* as one and, in this sense, is literally practicing what he preaches. For Protagoras, the issue is victory, honor, and glory—not the search for knowledge or truth. Furthermore, Protagoras acknowledges that what really distinguishes him is not knowledge or wisdom, but his success in "verbal contests." Plato presents him as the very opposite of Socrates. As Socrates will show, Protagoras' pretense to wisdom depends on denying the underlying wholeness of virtue. Protagoras' wisdom derives from his "knowing" that truth is merely a phantom. Furthermore, even if Protagoras actually understood the political art, the *Protagoras* seems to indicate that when *logos* is

[256] Protagoras says: "It's not so absolutely clear a case to me…it seems a distinction is in order here. But what's the difference? If you want, we'll let justice be pious and piety just" (331c).

used with a view toward victory rather than knowledge, incoherence follows. Since Protagoras refuses to accede to Socrates' request for short, pithy responses, Socrates starts to leave, but is restrained by Prodicus and Hippias. This is, as T. K. Seung notes, the moment of political crisis in the dialogue.[257] The conflict centers on tolerance: Protagoras will not tolerate the use of the Socratic method and Socrates will not tolerate the Protagorean method. Callias gently points out that the thing most needful is the virtue of reverence or respect (*aidos*), insofar as a discussion is necessarily a shared endeavor.[258]

Unsurprisingly, Protagoras challenges Socrates on terrain he is more comfortable of victory: the interpretation of poetry. While the song remains the same (virtue), the context moves to what is perhaps the most conventional Greek forum for discussing it—interpreting the wisdom of the poets. For our purposes, the most important observation about the contest are Socrates' outlandish (and hilarious) remarks about Spartan wisdom. He claims that philosophy "has its most ancient roots and is most widespread among the Greeks in Crete and Lacedaemon" (342a). However, if we are right about Plato's invitation for us to link Protagoras and Pericles, we should not be surprised by Socrates' remarks because in the dialogue Protagoras represents the headmaster of Pericles' "school of Hellas." Socrates argues that Spartan virtue is not simply a matter of courage and "their brave fighting men," but on wisdom, which they disguise in laconic sayings

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[257] Seung, *Plato Rediscovered: Human Value and Social Order*: 81.

[258] For a thorough discussion of reverence, see Woodruff, *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue*. It is worth pausing briefly to note another textual allusion to Thucydides. Prodicus' role is interesting and often overlooked by commentators. He makes a brief speech that draws distinctions between: impartial and equal, dispute and quarrel, esteem and praise, and delighted and pleased (337a-c). This kind of distinguishing between words that mean nearly the same thing recalls Thucydides' account of the *stasis* on Corcyra, where words began to lose their meanings, and the speech of the Corinthians to the Congress at Sparta. The Corinthians distinguish between criticism and accusation: "And let no one say that this [the Corinthian's claim that Sparta is to "blame" for Athenian injustices] is said out of hostility rather than as criticism; for criticism is directed toward friends who are in error, accusation toward enemies who are at fault" (1.69).

out of their fear that if others discovered that their power was due to wisdom—rather than "lacing on leather gloves, exercising fanatically, and wearing short capes"—they would begin to cultivate it themselves (342b). The "distinctive kind of Spartan wisdom in their pithy, memorable sayings" is what enables them to be fearless and composed in battle, as well as practice individual virtue. Socrates cautions that:

> You would know that what I say is true and that the Lacedaemonians have been best educated with a view to philosophy and speeches, by the following: if someone is willing to get together with the paltriest of Lacedaemonians, he will discover that, for the most part, the Lacedaemonian does indeed appear to be a paltry fellow when it comes to speeches. But then, at a certain point in what's being said, he throws out a brief and pithy utterance, one worthy of account, just like a terrific javelin [*akontistes*] thrower. (342d-e)[259]

Socrates uses his ironical humor here to warn the Athenian elite that their love of Periclean rhetoric will be insufficient to defeat Sparta. And Socrates' mention of a javelin thrower is perhaps no accident. Plutarch reports that Pericles' son Xanthippus—who is present in the *Protagoras*, told others:

> what Pericles got up to at home and the conversations he used to have with the sophists. For instance, when a competitor in the pentathlon accidentally hit Epitimius of Pharsalus with a javelin and killed him, Pericles spent a whole day discussing with Protagoras whether the javelin or the person who threw it or the organizers of the games should, speaking absolutely strictly, be held responsible for what had happened.[260]

If this story was indeed spread around Athens, it is no wonder Plato puts it to use here. To borrow one of Thucydides' favorite antilogies, it illustrates how laughably ineffectual sophistic speech or rhetoric (*logos*) is when confronted with the harsh reality of deeds (*ergon*). When faced with the deed of an impaled corpse, Pericles and Protagoras cannot

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[259] Plato, *Protagoras and Meno*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004). The Greek word *akontistes* means javelin-thrower. Liddell et al., "A Greek-English Lexicon," s.v. "akontistes".
[260] Plutarch, *Greek Lives : A Selection of Nine Greek Lives*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 176-77.

escape from their *logos*, and spend the day in presumably pleasant and *imaginative* debate. Socrates seems here to be laying the groundwork for his position that Protagoras and Pericles are relativists. Their concern with rhetoric or speech is notable in that grammar is perhaps the quintessential example of *nomos*. By their understanding, languages, like justice, will vary from place to place. At a minimum, this implies different kinds of justice in different places, and Plato invites us to consider whether the "school of Hellas" is nothing other than a master class in relativism that ended up damaging the souls of Athenians. Their habituation to injustice damaged their souls because it damaged their ability to know genuine pleasure and, hence, their ability to enjoy lives of happiness (*eudaimonia*) through virtue, of which justice is a part.

Protagoras argues that good is a relative term—that the same thing can be good for one species (humans) and bad for another (horses), and uses the example of oil to make his point: "But the good is such a multifaceted and variable thing that, in the case of oil, it is good for the external parts of the human body but very bad for the internal parts" (334b-c). Socrates reports that Protagoras' speech on the relativism of the good received such applause that he had to wait until it "died down" to respond (334d). As Paul Woodruff points out: "Such relativism may have furthered in some minds the independent idea that there is no such thing as an absolute good or an absolute evil."[261] I believe Plato intends to show us that Protagoras' position was not simply that the same thing can be equally useful depending on the circumstance, but that Protagoras believed the same thing can be equally *true*. Protagoras' position was significant enough for Plato to take it up again in the *Theaetetus*:

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[261] Woodruff, "Rhetoric and Relativism: Protagoras and Gorgias," 301. Woodruff goes on to say that this view "does not in itself entail extreme relativism." I agree with Woodruff that Protagoras' account here does not *necessarily* entail the denial of the possibility of absolute truth (but it might be *eikos*).

> Socrates: But look here, this is no ordinary account of knowledge you've come out with: it's what Protagoras used to maintain. He said the very same thing, only he put it in a rather different way. For he says, you know, that "Man is the measure of all things: of the things which are, that they are, and of the things which are not, that they are not." You have read this, of course?
>
> Theaetetus: Yes, often.
>
> Socrates: Then you know that he puts it something like this, that as each thing appears to me, so it is for me, and as it appears to you, so it is for you (152a).

According to Socrates, Protagoras claims that no opinion can ever be considered false, and every opinion is true for the person who holds it. Now, this weak relativism with respect to truth also implies that opposing views are also equally true. And this means that contrary or opposed views can both be true at the same time. But if this is the case, then "contrary" or "opposed" has no meaning and, therefore, there can be no common truth (or, presumably, a shared reality that it corresponds to).

After the interlude where Protagoras and Socrates give varying interpretations of Simonides' poem about Pittacus' maxim that it is difficult to be good, Socrates turns the discussion back to the question of the unity of the virtues, and adds courage to the other four. Protagoras claims that, even though the other virtues they have been discussing are "reasonably close to each other," courage is another matter entirely. For Protagoras, courage is qualitatively different from the others and cites as proof the fact that "you will find many people who are extremely unjust, impious, intemperate, and ignorant, and yet exceptionally courageous" (349d). Socrates objects to this understanding by introducing the role of confidence. According to him, though courageous men are often called confident, their confidence can arise from either knowledge or ignorance and, since confidence based on ignorance is "contemptible," courage must be knowledge-based. But Protagoras distances himself from this last claim. He is comfortable accepting that the courageous man is bold, and that virtue is noble or beautiful, but not that the

difference between courage and confidence is based on *knowledge*. Socrates pushes on nevertheless. The specific knowledge that is required for courage to be virtuous is knowing how to "live well" or "live badly"—which is nothing less than a knowledge of good and evil (351a-b). Socrates then introduces his famous hedonistic calculus: he equates good with pleasure and evil with pain. The specific knowledge in question turns out to be the knowledge that living well means living pleasurably and living badly is living in pain. As the hedonistic calculus goes, all pleasures are good and all pains are bad.

Protagoras does not accept Socrates' hedonism because he believes that there are pleasurable things that are bad and painful things that are good (and some things which are neither good nor bad). This is a highly conventional view—which Socrates skewers Protagoras for embracing, asking Protagoras why he cares so much about the opinions of the masses that, as we've seen, he derides. Socrates claims that the masses that Protagoras now seems to care so much about use pleasure and pain as their standard for determining whether something is good or bad. He continues, asserting that, on this basis, we need an arithmetic art of measurement to determine the goodness of "our actions and choices with respect to things large and small" (356d). Socrates suggests that courage is this art, since it deals with men's hopes and fears—which naturally involve calculations of pleasures and pains. As Socrates explains: "what one fears one holds to be bad; no one goes toward those things which he holds to be bad, or chooses those things willingly" (358e). Socrates argues that since the art is measurement, it must be knowledge and, since it is knowledge, courage must be identical to wisdom. After Protagoras agrees in order to conclude the discussion, Socrates asserts that: "everything is knowledge" (361b). All virtue, then, reduces to wisdom. Despite Protagoras' faux consent, he and Socrates put forth two very different understandings of virtue. As we've

noted, Protagoras' approach is purely conventional—indeed, he names and describes virtues as given by convention.[262] This is why he is so interested and careful about the opinions and conventions of the masses, particularly on matters of good and evil. Protagoras cannot embrace Socrates' thesis of the unity of the virtues because this would entail accepting a transcendent or absolute standard of goodness that would undermine his understanding of various communal or conventional moralities that operate through the division and severability of the virtues. For Protagoras, a man is virtuous by reference to the norms or conventions of his community. It is incomprehensible to him that a community might exist to help its citizens ascend toward transcendent virtue—as we saw in his myth, virtues exist only to preserve human kind.

Socrates' understanding could not be more different. As we saw in our discussion of the *Gorgias*, Socrates rejects conventionalism and argues for a transcendent standard for determining good and evil. His arithmetic art of measurement or hedonistic calculus is an attempt to move beyond or outside of convention as a standard for determining good and evil. Their different approaches to virtue reflect different understandings of education and of politics. Protagoras argues for instruction as indoctrination and submission to convention—an understanding of conventional beliefs and behavior are the ends of his educational program. Students need not understand or even question whether their conventions are good or evil; the conventions themselves will do this for them (and will be internalized in their souls through conditioning or "education"). In contrast, Socratic education begins with convention, but it does not end there. The end of Socratic education is knowledge and, as we shall see, this becomes one of the central themes of the *Republic*. Thucydides shows and rejects Pericles' imaginative, sophistic

[262] The consequences of this kind of conventionalism, specifically, the confluence of *pleonexia* and tyranny, is what Thucydides points out through his narrative structure.

understanding of the *polis* through the shaping of his narrative. Plato directs us to Thucydides' account not only because it supports his position, but because it provides him with the opportunity to deepen the account by connecting it to what he believes is its true source—Protagoras.

Chapter 4: Thucydides' Archaeology and Plato's *Republic*

The *Republic* can be seen as the culmination of Plato's response to the challenge represented by Callicles. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates responds to Callicles' *ethos* of aggression, greed, and tyranny with a primarily individual solution: the happy life devoted to individual virtue. This solution is inadequate because a happy life based exclusively on individual virtue ultimately requires a just city. So, while Socrates argues in the *Gorgias* that a virtuous individual would be happy even if beaten, tortured and defamed by unjust individuals, in the *Republic*, Socrates softens this position, saying instead that virtuous individuals confronted with "general savagery" should "lead a quiet life and do their own work" (496d).

Put another way, Socrates' solution in the *Gorgias* is a necessary, but not sufficient response to the problem of Callicles. It is a psychological rather than a civic solution. Indeed, it is difficult to see how a reformed Callicles could be enlisted in the service of the common good on the basis of the *Gorgias* alone. This is because, for Plato, the good is not something that be exclusively possessed by an individual—it is qualitatively different from property. Socrates makes this point to Callicles in reverse by showing that for good leaders to make their citizens' virtuous, they must first know virtue as individuals (515a-d). To the extent, however, that individual virtue *conflicts* with civic virtue or the common good, focusing on the individual alone can exacerbate the problem by introducing a selfish understanding of the good. This is, of course, why it is so important for Socrates to show why justice is good for the individual. Taken too far, this selfishness transforms into tyranny and, as we saw in the *Protagoras*, is what explains the need for justice—it serves to moderate the conflict between selfishness and the common good. Thus, individual and civic virtue must be harmonized, and it is in the *Republic*

where Plato has Socrates undertake this project in detail. In order to effectively do this, Plato will need to shift the focus of the Greek Enlightenment away from teachings that support *pleonexia* and re-educate the people. While perhaps not entirely fair—for example, Protagoras did not claim that *pleonexia* or tyranny was a logical implication or consequence of his anthropological teaching on human nature—Plato seems to believe that these are, in fact, the moral and political positions most likely to result from the sophistic point of view. As we shall see, Plato takes the Protagorean position seriously in the *Republic* by pointing out that resenting injustice is the starting point on the way to wisdom about justice.

Plato foreshadows this purpose in the dialogue's frame scene.[263] The *Republic* begins with Socrates "going down" (*kateben*) to the Piraeus with Plato's brother Glaucon for the festival of Bendis, a new goddess from Thrace whose cult is being introduced to Athens.[264] As many commentators have observed, the very first word of the *Republic* reveals a descent.[265] Homer uses the same word, *kateben*, in Book XXIII of the *Odyssey*. After killing Penelope's suitors, Odysseus tells Penelope that his work is not yet finished:

> There is still a long, hard task for me to complete,
> As the spirit of Tiresias foretold to me
> On the day I went down to the house of Hades
> To ask him about my companions' return

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[263] As Seth Benardete wonderfully puts it: "Symbolism is shorthand for an argument." Seth Benardete, *Socrates' Second Sailing: On Plato's Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 9.

[264] It often goes unremarked that Socrates reports that the action of the *Republic* took place "yesterday." This is an astonishing display of endurance. Socrates walks 5 miles, stays up all night in conversation, walks another 5 miles uphill, and then is so interested in relaying what happened in the house of Cephalus that he reports the conversation in detail, without a break, and presumably before sleeping. I conducted an an-hoc experiment to see how long it would take to perform the dialogue by taking a small random sample of pages and reading them aloud as if in performance. Done in this fashion, it would take over twelve hours to perform the *Republic*. This kind of stamina is also seen in Socrates' behavior after the *Symposium*, where, after staying up all night, he washes up and spent the rest of the day "just as he always did, and only then, as evening was falling, went home to rest" (223d).

[265] Eric Voegelin takes this one step further, claiming that the Piraeus represents Hades. Voegelin, *Order and History*, 3.

And my own. (23: 255-260)[266]

The word *kateben* will reappear later in the *Republic*, during Socrates' famous parable of the cave. In response to Glaucon's concern that they will be doing an injustice to the philosopher-kings by making them descend back into the cave to rule, Socrates says that they will tell the philosopher-kings:

> each of you in turn must go down to live in the common dwelling place of the others and grow accustomed to seeing in the dark…Thus, for you and for us, the city will be governed, not like the majority of cities nowadays, by people who fight over shadows and struggle against one another in order to rule—as if that were a great good—but by people who are awake rather than dreaming, for the truth is surely this: A city whose prospective rulers are least eager to rule must of necessity be most free from civil war. (520c-d)

The very first word of the dialogue, then, anticipates Socrates' instruction on the relationship between justice and the common good:

> It isn't the law's concern to make any one class in the city outstandingly happy but to contrive to spread happiness throughout the city by bringing the citizens into harmony with each other through persuasion or compulsion and by making them share with each other the benefits that each class can confer on the community. The law produces such people in the city, not in order to allow them to turn in whatever direction they want, but to make use of them to bind the city together. (519e-520a)

Socrates descends from Athens to its port approximately five miles away. The Piraeus is the military and commercial seaport of Athens and, in the civil strife (*stasis*) following Athens' eventual defeat, will be the site of a critical battle. The Athenian democrats led by Thrasybulus will seize control of the Piraeus and defeat the Thirty Tyrants in a pitched battle by the temple of Bendis.[267] Before the construction of the Piraeus, the Athenian seaport was Phaleron, but it was too small and shallow to support the imperial navy, so Themistocles built fortifications around the Piraeus. Most of the

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[266] Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. Stanley Lombardo (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2000).
[267] G. R. F. Ferrari, "Introduction," in *The Republic*, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), xi-xii.

people who lived in the Piraeus were foreigners who conducted business in Athens, like Cephalus, whose family of shield makers were invited to Athens from Sicily by none other than Pericles himself.[268] Naturally, given the foreign influence, the Piraeus was a place of innovative ideas and unusual practices.[269] But the Piraeus was more than simply an interesting diversion—it was the lifeblood of Athens. Athens had grown so large that she could not produce enough grain to feed herself. Her reliance on imports was exacerbated during the Peloponnesian War when the entire Athenian population lived within her protective walls rather than in the countryside. The Piraeus grew to become a great city in its own right and was designed by "the world's first professional urban planner, Hippodamus of Miletus."[270] With its three protected harbors and massive storage sheds for the ships, Piraeus was unquestionably the center of the Athenian navy—the basis, as John Hale shows, of both Athens' empire and her democracy. His description of Hippodamus will resonate with readers of the *Republic*:

> No mere surveyor of streets, Hippodamus was in fact a utopian theorist. His quest led him in search of a physical setting for the perfect human community: social, spatial, and spiritual. Along with his own mastery of philosophy, meteorology, and architecture, Hippodamus seemed to see threefold divisions everywhere. In his ideal city the population would be divided into three classes: craftsmen, farmers, and warriors.[271]

It is fitting, then, that the inaugural festival of Bendis takes place in the seaport—the Athenians are importing a goddess just like they import their grain from the Hellespont and, as Thucydides tells us, the plague that would ravage the Athenian

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[268] According to Nails, Pericles "persuaded Cephalus to settle in Athens, probably in the late 450s, when the economy of Athens welcomed foreign residents, and before any backlash.… having established a successful shield factory that had over a hundred slaves by 404." Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and other Socratics*: 84.

[269] Allan Bloom notes in his translation that the Piraeus "seems to have been a center for innovations in everything, including religion." Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 441.

[270] John R. Hale, *Lords of the Sea: The Epic Story of the Athenian Navy and the Birth of Democracy* (New York: Viking, 2009), 115.

[271] Ibid.

population. The theme of innovation—the death of the old and the birth of the new—runs through the *Republic*. On the same night the Athenians introduce a new cult goddess, Socrates invents the *Kallipolis*, and will introduce new ideas of the soul and the gods that, according to Walter Burkert, will revolutionize Greek religion:

> Since Plato and through him, religion has been essentially different from what it had been before….It is Plato who brings about a revolution in religious language and in piety at one and the same time. Thereafter we find faith supported by philosophy, love transcending the world, and hope for an afterlife; there is humility, service of the gods, and at the same time the goal of assimilation to god.[272]

What's more, according to Christopher Planeaux's recent review of the evidence, the date of the first Bendis celebration in Attica was early June 429, during the second summer of the plague and, as Thucydides describes, a desperate time for Athens.[273] In the *Republic*, then, Plato has Socrates introduce a new teaching designed to save what *truly* sickens Athens on the same evening the Athenians look to Bendis—the goddess of moon and the night—in their time of need. The Athenians are so turned around that they choose to remain in the darkness of the cave and desperately need the light of philosophy.[274] Plato situates the *Republic* in the center of Athenian decadence and empire on the day where its people celebrate their desire to remain chained in the cave by choosing to celebrate the goddess of the night.

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[272] Burkert, *Greek Religion*: 322, 275.

[273] Christopher Planeaux, "The Date of Bendis' Entry into Attica," *The Classical Journal* 96, no. 2 (2000).

[274] It is said that Plato rewrote Book I of the *Republic* many times. See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, III.37, and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *De compositione verborum*, 25.209. If this is correct, then it is likely that he thought Book I was very important and, as a result, it is worth spending some time trying to determine Plato's purpose in staging the *Republic* the way he did. See Francisco Gonzalez's illustration of this point in Francisco Gonzalez, "How to Read a Platonic Prologue: Lysis 203a-207d," in *Plato as Author : The Rhetoric of Philosophy*, ed. Ann N. Michelini (Leiden: Brill, 2003). Gerald Press is similarly insightful in Gerald A. Press, "Principles of Dramatic and Non-dogmatic Plato Interpretation," in *Plato's Dialogues: New Studies and Interpretations*, ed. Gerald A. Press (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993).

I think there is solid evidence for believing that the conversation of the *Republic* occurs in the context of the cave that is imperial Athens. If this is so, then we should attend to Socrates' instruction in Book VII to apply the image of the cave "as a whole to all that has been said" (517a-b).[275] In his initial description of the cave and its dwellers, Glaucon says that: "It's a strange image you're [Socrates] describing, and strange prisoners" (515a). Socrates ignores Glaucon's concern about the image of the cave and turns immediately to what he sees as Glaucon's more fundamental misunderstanding of its inhabitants, saying that: "they're like us" (515a). The allegory of the cave is not meant as some kind of fantasy divorced from the real world, it represents what a community looks like when it is not ruled or grounded by philosophy.[276]

The cave is dominated by images of violence and compulsion. Socrates uses the word compel (*ananke*) ten times during his parable (515a-517a), the same word that Thucydides reports the Athenians used in their speech at Sparta to explain their imperialism and attachment to empire (1.76). Socrates says that a man returning to the cave having been in the light of day would argue with the prisoners like in a courtroom, one of the most famous Athenian inventions (517d-e). And, were he to try to free the cave's prisoners and lead them upward, the prisoners would "kill him" (517a). Like the description of the cave, the *Republic's* opening scene is also characterized by images of force and threats of violence. When Socrates and Glaucon start their return to Athens, they are physically restrained by Polemarchus' slave, who grabs Socrates' cloak. After Socrates says that he and Glaucon are heading home, Polemarchus (who will later be killed by the Thirty) increases the stakes, saying: "Do you see how many we are?...Well,

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[275] Plato, *Republic*, trans. Paul Shorey (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935).
[276] Dale Hall, "Interpreting Plato's Cave as an Allegory of the Human Condition," *Apeiron* 14, no. 2 (1980): 74-86.

you must either prove stronger than we are, or you will have to stay here" (327c). When Socrates suggests that he and Glaucon might persuade them to let he and Glaucon go free, Polemarchus replies that it will be to no avail because, like the prisoners in the cave, "we won't listen" (327c). Since Glaucon's brother Adeimantus is among Polemarchus' gang, we are reminded of Thucydides' account of the Corcyrean *stasis* where family members killed each other (this will resurface in our consideration of Thrasymachus). While Socrates and Glaucon capitulate, it is interesting to note that the word Socrates uses to indicate his capitulation is identical to that used by the Athenian Assembly to indicate the passage of a law.[277]

If we examine the way Book I unfolds with the cave allegory in mind, we can see that the entire discussion of the nature of justice takes place underground.[278] Socrates' three arguments—with Cephalus, Polemarchus, and Thrasymachus—follow the same pattern. Each of his interlocutors puts forth a view of justice, which Socrates is able to undermine through his questioning. None of the three views are ever said to constitute knowledge. They are, rather, three opinions or *images* of justice. Cephalus thinks of justice in terms of rewards and punishments—giving back what you've taken and telling the truth—and understands these in terms of obeying divine commands. Socrates shows that this understanding of justice as honestly adhering to rules is problematic because sometimes giving things back and telling the truth are bad for everyone concerned, and justice must be something good. Polemarchus transforms Simonides' maxim that justice

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[277] Allan Bloom describes this scene as "a dramatic prefiguration of the whole political problem." Plato, *The Republic of Plato*: 441n6.

[278] Kimon Lycos argues that the purpose of Book I is to "turn the soul around…[to see] the realities of justice…rather than merely considering its conventionally recognized 'appearances.'" He also suggests that "the relation of Book I to the rest of the work corresponds somewhat to the powerful and highly influential image of the Cave Plato describes in Book VII." Kimon Lycos, *Plato on Justice and Power: Reading Book I of Plato's Republic* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1987), 6.

is giving each his due into justice as helping friends and harming enemies.[279] Socrates shows that this understanding of justice as a kind of crude patriotism is insufficient because it can sometimes mean harming good individuals, and the idea of justice as virtue is incompatible with harming anyone because it makes them unjust.[280] Thrasymachus argues that justice is merely the advantage of the stronger and makes an unabashed appeal to *pleonexia*. Thrasymachus seems to represent what is found at the back or bottom of the cave—pure appetite, raw power, and greed. Plato's setting of the *Republic*, then, invites us to consider that, in a world without the love of wisdom, Thrasymachus' victory is perhaps inescapable. As Julia Annas puts it, Plato intends to demonstrate that the "void [of Cephalus and Polemarchus] is all too plausibly filled by his [Thrasymachus'] skepticism."[281]

Let us now turn our attention to Thrasymachus. Thrasymachus was a famous sophist orator from Chalcedon who traveled from city to city teaching the art of persuasion. He was especially well known for his stylistic innovations.[282] According to Stephen A. White's recent investigation into his activities and beliefs, Thrasymachus was also an experienced diplomat.[283] White persuasively argues that after Chalcedon's failed

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[279] Indeed, we might say that the entire argument of the *Republic* is Plato's attempt to find meaning in Simonides' maxim. It is worth noting as well that the conversation or contest between Polemarchus and Socrates over the meaning of Simonides' maxim parallels that between Protagoras and Socrates in the *Protagoras*, and links the dialogues.

[280] The Polemarchean idea of justice remains alive and well. Presidential candidate Herman Cain recently articulated this understanding of justice, saying that: "We must clarify who our friends are, clarify who our enemies are, and stop giving money to our enemies." Trip Gabriel, "Tested Again and Again, Cain Takes Comfort in His Rise in the Polls," *The New York Times*, 2011/10/31/ 2011.

[281] See Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 21. It is worth noting here that, though Socrates shows how each of these views about justice is inadequate, he never puts forth his own definition of justice, pleading ignorance (337e). As we shall see, justice is built into *Kallipolis* as the virtue necessary in the design of the city. We might, therefore, consider the construction of *Kallipolis* as a thought experiment designed to reveal the truth about justice.

[282] Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and other Socratics*: 288-89.

[283] Stephen A. White, "Thrasymachus the Diplomat," *Classical Philology* 90, no. 4 (1995): 324. White argues that it is almost certainly Thrasymachus the sophist who Aristotle mentions in the *Politics* (1305a1) as having overthrown the Cymean democracy.

revolt against Athens in 407, Thrasymachus came to Athens as a diplomat on Chalcedon's behalf, hoping to persuade the Athenians to allow his native city to retain much of her autonomy, and to prevent harsher sanctions against her.[284] Though it is not difficult to find inconsistencies in his argument, failing to take Thrasymachus seriously is a mistake.[285] He is perhaps the most brazen immoralist in all of Plato's dialogues and, as we've seen in previous chapters, his views were reasonably widespread. As he did in his portrayals of Callicles and Protagoras, Plato again signals us to look to Thucydides to better understand the practical consequences of Thrasymachus' position. As we saw in Chapter One, the most famous articulation of Thrasymachus' view that justice is merely the advantage of the stronger is put forth by the Athenian Ambassadors on Melos.[286] Yet, this is not the passage of Thucydides that Plato directs us to, probably because the arguments of the Athenian Ambassadors are more similar to those of Callicles, who uses nature as a standard to ground his theory of justice. Instead, Plato ties Thrasymachus' position to the *stasis* on Corcyra. This is most clearly revealed in the *Republic's* cast of characters and staging, which suggestively foreshadow the Athenian *stasis*. Let us look at the specific linkage in the context of Thrasymachus' argument.

Thrasymachus twice mocks Socrates "simple-mindedness" (*euethes*), saying that only "those who are simple (*euethes*)" take justice seriously (343c-d).[287] This same word

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[284] White argues that the historical Thrasymachus did not endorse an account of justice as force. Rather, Thrasymachus is simply describing the hated practices he associated with Athenian imperialism. For White, Thrasymachus is not a "realist" like the Athenian Ambassadors at Melos, but is "an idealist… [expressing] the outrage of a man disillusioned and embittered by the brutal realities of fifth-century power politics." Ibid., 322.

[285] As we shall see, he argues that justice is the advantage of the stronger, but calls tyranny the most complete *injustice*, when his argument should have this be the peak of justice (344a-c).

[286] It also appears as an unstated assumption during the Mytilenean Debate (over what the Athenians should do with the Mytileneans), where Diodotus reminds the Athenians that: "Our dispute, if we are sensible, will concern not their injustice to us, but our judgment as to what is best for us" (3.44, Woodruff translation).

[287] The first instance of *euethes* is at 336c.

appears again at 348c-d, when Socrates asks Thrasymachus to recapitulate his position on justice "from the beginning." The interchange runs as follows:

> Socrates: You say that complete injustice is more profitable than complete justice?
>
> Thrasymachus: I certainly do say that, and I've told you why.
>
> Socrates: Well, then, what do you say about this? Do you call one of the two a virtue and the other a vice?
>
> Thrasymachus: Of course.
>
> Socrates: That is to say, you call justice a virtue and injustice a vice?
>
> Thrasymachus: That's hardly likely, since I say that injustice is profitable and justice isn't.
>
> Socrates: Then, what exactly do you say?
>
> Thrasymachus: The opposite.
>
> Socrates: That justice is a vice?
>
> Thrasymachus: No, just very high-minded simplicity (*euetheia*)
>
> Socrates: Then do you call being unjust low-minded?
>
> Thrasymachus: No, I call it good judgment (*euboulia*)[288]

This exchange between Socrates and Thrasymachus presents in miniature the horror Thucydides described on Corcyra. In Greek, *euethes* is a combination of *eu* (good) and *ethos* (habit or custom). It, therefore, illustrates etymologically the virtue of being good out of habit rather than calculation. Socrates articulates the traditional understanding of *euethes* and *euethia* as having a positive connotation, meaning "simple," "good-natured," or "well-meaning," whereas Thrasymachus, to borrow Nietzsche's term, transvalues it to

[288] Note that *euboulia* is what Protagoras claims to teach and what is, in the most elevated sense, the wisdom of Plato's Guardians. See *Protagoras* 319a.

a negative, meaning "foolish," or "stupid." The term *euethes* provides the specific thematic link to Thucydides, for he tells us that the meaning of *euethes* changed from positive to negative during the *stasis* on Corcyra: "Thus was every kind of wickedness afoot throughout all Greece by the occasion of civil wars. Simplicity (*euethes*), which is the chief cause of a generous spirit, was laughed down and disappeared" (3.83).[289] Recall that in Chapter One, we examined Thucydides' account of the Corcyrean *stasis* and found that he corroborates Thrasymachus' account: words changed their meaning because men's judgment or minds were no longer sound; they became twisted by their passionate desire to rule based on greed and ambition. The meaning of words, therefore, changed to fit the interests of the dominant faction (3.82). More important that this, however, is that for Thucydides, *euethes* is the animating cause of generosity. As Martha Nussbaum observes: "Thucydides stresses that virtuous character rests on a foundation of confidence in conditions that exist outside the self."[290] That is, to the extent that justice is an externally-facing or other-regarding virtue, the loss of the traditional understanding of *euethes* cripples the generosity or other-regardingness that habits of justice require.

Furthermore, if we think of language as the quintessential *nomos*, then linguistic stability is a reflection of social and political stability. I believe that Plato draws our attention to Thucydides here to signal that the *Republic* is Plato's solution to the problem of *stasis*. Longing for the "ancient simplicity" or tradition, as Thucydides does, is an inadequate solution for Plato.[291] After all, Thucydides himself has already shown the

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[289] Woodruff translation. Lattimore renders the passage: "In this way, every form of viciousness was established in the Hellenic world on account of the civil wars, and the simplicity (*euethes*) that is especially found in noble natures disappeared because it became ridiculous" (3.83).

[290] Martha Craven Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 405.

[291] Crane, *Thucydides and the Ancient Simplicity: The Limits of Political Realism*. Crane cites the Crawley translation of *to euethes*.

instability of language and social norms when they are understood in an exclusively positivist (or Thrasymachean) manner. There is ultimately no solution to the challenge of Corcyra or Thrasymachus at the level of positive norms—tradition or convention is simply too unstable when put to the test of war and plague (or violence and death). When these are unleashed, *nomos* fails and consistency is the best we can hope for. Indeed, if it were merely a matter of correct grammar or usage, the argument with Thrasymachus would be extremely brief and would simply consist of correcting his use of *to euethes*. Instead, Plato saw that the normative positivism of Thrasymachus and Protagoras could never provide a durable solution to the problem of *pleonexia* because normative positivism can never subject itself to critical evaluation (other than mere internal consistency)—it lacks the ability to take an external perspective to examine or assess positive norms.

Returning to the dialogue, the manner in which Thrasymachus enters into the dialogue represents the cloud of violence, imperialism, and greed that hangs over Book I. Socrates recounts that:

> While we were speaking, Thrasymachus had tried many times to take over the discussion but was restrained by those sitting near him, who wanted to hear our argument to the end. When we paused after what I had just said, however, he couldn't keep quiet any longer. He coiled himself up like a wild beast about to spring, and he hurled himself at us as if to tear us to pieces. (336b)

Before announcing his view on justice, Thrasymachus begins by attributing bad motives to Socrates. After indicting Socrates and Polemarchus for being "naïve" or simple-minded (*euethes*), Thrasymachus charges Socrates with asking rather than answering questions on the grounds that it is easier to ask than answer. He further claims that Socrates' motive for doing this is that he is motivated by a "love of honor" (*philotimia*, 336c). In Thucydides' account, *philotimia* is one of the two drivers of the transvaluation

of language at Corcyra (of which *euethes* is the prime example). Thrasymachus accuses Socrates of taking lessons from others without giving anything in return (338b). And, finally, he says that he thinks that Socrates is trying to "overpower" him (341a-b). His experience with Athenian imperialism perhaps leads him to attribute these motives to Socrates. Having been on the receiving end of Athenian power politics, Thrasymachus parrots back the restrictive initial demand of the Athenian Ambassadors at Melos: "And don't tell me [justice] is the right, the beneficial, the profitable, the gainful, or the advantageous" (336d). Like the Melians, Socrates admits that his response would likely be "one of the forbidden answers" (337c).

As we've noted, Thrasymachus begins his account with his claim that justice is the advantage of the stronger (338c). He expands on this maxim, pointing out that in every city, some individual or group rules by some kind of forceful means—arms, will, cleverness, etc. It is in this sense that they are stronger (*kreitton*). Thus, in a tyranny, one individual is stronger; in a democracy, the many are stronger (338d-339a). In each circumstance, the stronger establish laws to their own advantage, and the word "justice" is what they call adherence to these laws. Thrasymachus, then, initially appears as one of the first legal positivists—for him, there is no such thing as justice other than the *nomos* that the rulers demand and the ruled observe. And because the *nomos* are nothing other than the advantage of the stronger, Thrasymachus concludes that justice is a sham or a pretty name given by the rulers that disguises the underlying exploitative truth. Socrates quickly (and cuttingly) points out some common ground as well as a significant difference between he and Thrasymachus, noting that he would have given a similar answer—that justice is advantageous—but that Thrasymachus wouldn't permit it. But the difference between their understandings—Thrasymachus' addition of "of the stronger"—is significant to Socrates. This addition circumscribes or relativizes justice's

advantage. Justice is advantageous, but it is advantage relative to "the stronger," which is itself relative to "the rulers."[292] Socrates notes that in the course of his argument Thrasymachus has said two different things: (1) that justice is the advantage of the stronger—meaning the rulers—and (2) that justice is obeying the laws promulgated by the rulers. Socrates raises the same serious concern with Thrasymachus' view of justice as he did with Protagoras' epistemology—the possibility of error. What if the rulers make a mistake and establish laws that are not to their own advantage? As we have seen, admitting the possibility of error involves accepting the existence of an *external* standard or measure. Thrasymachus' account of justice appears to exclude the possibility of an external standard because it relativizes the measure of justice to the individual and his strength or power. As we shall see, Socrates shows that this understanding of justice becomes problematic as soon as any evaluative standard independent of the individual is introduced, because it entails that the stronger can be mistaken about what is to his or her advantage. Cleitophon recognizes the power of Socrates' objection and tries to rescue the argument by removing the standard, saying that what Thrasymachus "meant by what is advantageous for the stronger is what the stronger *believes* to be advantageous for him" (340b).[293]

Thrasymachus' response to this is surprising. If he really is a relativist, then Cleitophon's clarification would help his argument and Thrasymachus should take it, because it keeps the standard of "stronger" at the level of how it *appears* to each individual.[294] Instead, however, he insists on *effectiveness* as the standard for

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[292] This is entirely consistent with the view of the Athenian Ambassadors at Melos that justice is only operative between those of equal power.

[293] Plato, *Republic*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2004).

[294] This is another way of saying that Cleitophon may be a consistent relativist. In his eponymous dialogue, Cleitophon is not convinced that knowledge can replace opinion. For him, all Socrates is capable

determining relative strength, arguing that when rulers err, they are not rulers in the "precise" sense (340e). Speaking precisely, Thrasymachus claims that rulers are like artisans and are guided by expertise. Thus, when a doctor misdiagnoses an illness or an accountant makes a rounding error, we might say something like: "you're no doctor (or accountant), you're a hack!" And what we mean by saying this is that when the doctor errs, he or she is not exercising the expertise that makes a doctor a real or genuine doctor. Strictly speaking, the name of a *techne* should only be applied when it is effectively carried out. This principle extends to the art of ruling. When a ruler makes laws that are not to his own advantage he is not, strictly speaking, a ruler. Rulers who consistently make mistakes are not worthy of being called rulers—they are the functional equivalent of doctors who can't tell whether someone is dead or alive or accountants who can't add.[295] Those without knowledge are merely imposters; they may wear the uniform or have the trappings of the expert, but, like the emperor in the Hans Christian Andersen tale, these experts have no clothes. As an expert himself, Thrasymachus has great respect for knowledge and skill (and contempt for ignorance).[296] Thus, for him *pleonexia* isn't an issue, but ignorance, incompetence, or stupidity is.

Thrasymachus' claim that might makes right radicalizes Protagoras' maxim that "man is the measure." This is why he rejects Cleitophon's amendment—which is a consistent relativism based on subjectivism (where an individual's belief of his or her advantage is the only standard). Cleitophon's position is that the ruler's power ultimately

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of doing is urging individuals to embrace philosophy and justice. He is not persuaded that Socrates has any *grounds* for this view.

[295] While the logic of Thrasymachus' argument implies that infallibility is required to earn the term "ruler"—or any respective *techne*—it remains unclear how extreme his view is on this point.

[296] Interestingly, while Thrasymachus appears to flip-flop on many things, he never wavers from his belief that knowledge is good.

exists only in his own mind.[297] Thrasymachus does not want to limit power in such a manner. As Basil Mitchell and J.R. Lucas put it, accepting Cleitophon's admission would have maintained Thrasymachus' consistency of argument, "at the cost of making [his position] vacuous."[298] Thrasymachus would be sacrificing his valorization of power at the altar of internal consistency. This is counter to what his position implies. Both Socrates and Thrasymachus want to link truth and power. Socrates will do this in his doctrine of the philosopher-king; Thrasymachus tries to do this by linking *belief* and power.[299] When he identifies the ideal ruler as one who rules perfectly in his own interest, Thrasymachus subsumes truth into power. For Thrasymachus, power is the standard to which everything else is relative.

Socrates objects to Thrasymachus' understanding, arguing that artisans and experts, strictly speaking, benefit the people they serve rather than themselves. Using Thrasymachus' examples, a doctor in the strict sense does not benefit himself but his patient. Likewise, a ruler in the strict sense benefits the ruled. For Socrates, arts are understood in terms of their purposes or in what sense they are advantageous, beneficial, or good. And Socrates argues that the benefits of the various arts are external or other-regarding. Unsurprisingly, this does not square with Thrasymachus' desire to dominate or effectively impose power. Thrasymachus again calls Socrates "simple-minded" or naïve (*euethes*), and shifts the discussion from a concern for truth to a discussion of advantage. To make his point, Thrasymachus offers an example of the shepherd and his flock, arguing that the shepherd doesn't fatten and tend his flock for the animals well

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[297] In this sense, Cleitophon's view of the power of the intellect is congruent with Thucydides' presentation of Pericles.

[298] Basil Mitchell and J. R. Lucas, *An Engagement with Plato's Republic: A Companion to The Republic* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 4.

[299] My analysis of Thrasymachus draws on conversations with T.K. Seung and Thomas Pangle. I am grateful for their generosity.

being, but because he wants their wool or meat (or the income from their sale). The shepherd is no PETA activist—his interest in the animals is purely instrumental. Justice gives the illusion that there is a common good, when, in truth, there is no such thing. Indeed, as soon as the shepherd's interest goes beyond tending and selling wool and extends to killing the sheep for their meat, then there ceases to be a common good between the shepherd and the sheep. For the ruled, acting justly is simply harming themselves for the happiness of their rulers (343c).[300] Thrasymachus argues that rulers (since he believes they are artisans and experts) are no different from his shepherds; they care only for their own good. And he extends this, saying the greatest good is being a tyrant, because tyrants are the most capable of overreaching (*pleonexia*) on a grand scale.

Something unusual happens at this point in the exchange. Thrasymachus is evidently quite worked up by this discussion because he claims that tyranny is the height of *injustice*. Speaking of tyranny, Thrasymachus calls it the "most complete injustice, the one that makes the doer of injustice happiest and the sufferers of it, who are unwilling to do injustice, most wretched" (344a). This is a peculiar statement for Thrasymachus to make because, according to his own definition, tyranny should be the consummate form of *justice*, not injustice. That is, if justice is "the advantage of the stronger," and one man is "stronger," then it is just for him to seek his own advantage and, in this example, become a tyrant if this is what he thinks is his interest or advantage. This is nothing other than legal positivism. Instead, Thrasymachus articulates here the conventional understanding of *injustice*—unfairly seeking one's own advantage or unbridled greed, independent of the individual in question's weakness or strength. Socrates chooses to ignore this apparent slip-up, focusing instead on the craft (*techne*) analogy. He argues

[300] Note that Thrasymachus admits that justice is other-regarding—it is "really the good of another" (343c).

that Thrasymachus' shepherd actually practices two arts: (1) the shepherding art, which is directed toward the good of the sheep (assuming it is beneficial for sheep to be fattened) and (2) the wage-earner's art, which is directed toward the good of the shepherd himself. So it seems that every art except wage-earning is directed toward the good of others. However, the introduction of the wage-earning art is a problem for Socrates insofar as it acknowledges that there is at least one art that is solely directed to one's own benefit. If ruling turns out to be an expanded form of the wage-earning art applied to politics, then Thrasymachus' position would be vindicated. Tyranny (and ruling generally) would simply be the quintessential self-beneficial art. This evidently does not occur to Thrasymachus—just as it didn't occur to him that, by his own understanding, the tyrant should be called just.

Socrates' position here is quite important and, in my view, too often passed over. He contends that people practice the other arts for the sake of earning wages, not vice versa. Shoemakers make shoes in order to earn money. They do not earn money in order to make shoes. Socrates thinks this makes perfect sense—no one would go around benefitting others unless he or she benefits in some way (346d-e). And, since ruling is simply caring for the well being of others, Socrates claims that no one with any sense would rule without some incentives (including compulsion). Ruling requires voluntarily "taking other people's troubles in hand and straightening them out" (346e).[301] There seems to be, then, some common ground between Socrates and Thrasymachus. If no one likes justice or serving others simply for its own sake, then their disagreement is over the *goodness* of justice. For Thrasymachus, justice is simply unnecessary because it is possible to benefit yourself without needing to benefit anyone else. In contrast, Socrates

[301] Shorey translation.

argues that justice is necessary—you must benefit others to make it possible to get any benefit for yourself. This is perhaps what provokes Glaucon to make his demand that Socrates defend justice as good for the individual as well as for its own sake at the beginning of Book II. At this point, however, we might say that the difference between Socrates and Thrasymachus is this: for Socrates, the power of an art lies in its ability to serve others, whereas for Thrasymachus, the power of an art lies in its ability to acquire for oneself.

The next exchange between Socrates and Thrasymachus is, I believe, the most significant in the dialogue. This is because, in the middle of it, Socrates remarks: "All the same, we must not shrink from pursuing the argument and looking into this, just as long as I take you to be saying what you really think. You see, I believe that you really are not joking now, Thrasymachus, but saying what you believe to be the truth" (349a).[302] This implies that Socrates may believe that Thrasymachus *wasn't* being entirely candid before (though his speech certainly gave the appearance of candor). And, since Thrasymachus later says that he doesn't consider what he is saying to be what he really believes, I think this exchange is particularly important (especially since it generates Thrasymachus' famous blush). As we've seen, Socrates begins by getting Thrasymachus to agree that injustice is good judgment (*euboulia*)[303] and that the unjust—having good judgment—are also wise, good, virtuous and noble (348d-350b). Socrates then solicits Thrasymachus' belief (which contradicts his prior claims) that the unjust man "*deserves* to do better than everyone," including other unjust men or actions (349c-d, italics mine).[304] Thrasymachus' belief is normative, not descriptive: the unjust man not only

[302] Reeve translation.
[303] This implies that Thrasymachus thinks that Protagoras teaches injustice.
[304] Reeve translation.

does better than everyone else, he *deserves* to do better. And this position implies an understanding of justice that contradicts Thrasymachus' previous teaching. The problem for Thrasymachus is that he believes that the wise *deserve* to win. This is odd because his supposed wisdom is that there is no such thing as deserving. It is at this point that Thrasymachus blushes because Socrates has exposed a contradiction in his soul. Thrasymachus denies that there is such a thing as justice or deserving, but his own desire for esteem (and the justness it implies) is too strong for him to overcome. If Thrasymachus abandoned his belief in deserving—that *pleonexia* on a grand scale has nothing to do with deserving its spoils—he would be forced to relinquish any claim to deserve the respect he so desires. However, he is unable to jettison the deeply human hope for happiness that rests on the belief that, if we are good, then we deserve and will someday receive the spoils (including happiness).

On the other hand, Thrasymachus could abandon his denial of justice, arguing instead that it is something like wise injustice that makes men deserving, and that unjust men will defer to other unjust men. This, of course, is unworkable because it would imply a kind of *justice* among thieves. If unjust men recognized each other as deserving, they would be similar to conventionally just men. And, were this to occur, these very men would no longer be deserving, because they would no longer be unjust. The problem, then, is akin to the famous problem of evil that makes it unreasonable to believe in the existence of God. The existence of God implies omnipotence, omniscience and perfect goodness, and the problem of evil implies that you can have two, but not all three. Similarly, in the case of Thrasymachus we have three things: injustice, wisdom, and deserving. While Thrasymachus can put two of them together and remain consistent, he cannot add the third. It is very difficult, then, to truly and consistently abandon justice. Socrates shows us here that the belief in justice is so powerful that even people who

claim to have arguments rejecting it remain captive to it. Instead, it seems that what lies at the root of Thrasymachus' account is something like righteous indignation or a deep belief in justice as deservingness. Even though he may be deeply confused or has willfully pulled the wool over his own eyes out of self-protection (as Thucydides shows the Athenians doing), this is not what Thrasymachus *teaches*. Instead, he argues for an unbridled *pleonexia* that Plato believes the Athenians have begun to internalize—it operates at an almost unconscious level.

The word *pleonexia* is used throughout the *Republic* to denote the tyrant or the tyrannical regime. This suggests that in Plato's representation at least, *pleonexia* has become associated with the normative position of immoralists like Thrasymachus and Callicles, who explicitly advise abandoning the idea of distributive justice in the city in favor of unbridled self-interest. As we've seen, immoralists ground their advice on various considerations—from manliness (*andreia*), natural over conventional justice (*nomos/phusis*), or simply as a form of self-gratification. Thrasymachus, then, seems to endorse conventional injustice as a type of self-gratification since, as we've seen, he does not argue that tyranny and *pleonexia* are in fact just: "But when someone, in addition to appropriating their possessions, kidnaps and enslaves the citizens as well, instead of these shameful names he is called happy and blessed, not only by the citizens themselves, but by all who learn that he has done the whole of injustice" (344b-c). According to Thrasymachus, *pleonexia* is a kind of outsized greed that exemplifies the apparently limitless appetite of the tyrant. In constructing his ideal city, Plato does not deny the authenticity of strong desires to get more.[305] Rather, he gives an account of such desires that explains when and how limits are to be placed on them. He does this by elaborating

[305] This is an essential difference between the *Republic* and the *Gorgias*.

a system of education, which trains his Guardians to grasp the eternal Forms that spring from the Form of the Good. Conceived in this way, the *Republic* represents Plato's attempt to circumscribe or re-educate the Athenian soul away from appetitiveness. Like Thucydides, he recognizes the potentially fatal blow that the sophistic critiques will have on traditional Greek ways of circumscribing aggression and excess.[306] As a result, Socrates will ascend from the Piraeus with a new civic "religion" that grounds morality in a non-religious (or at least not traditionally religious) framework.[307] Let us examine how this occurs.

Plato introduces the Form of the Good at the end of Book VI as a way of understanding justice analogically. During the initial search for justice under the auspices of the analogy between the city and the individual soul, after founding the city-in-speech and before looking for its virtues in Book IV, Socrates remarks that they need to "get an adequate light somewhere" (427d). When they turn to the individual, Socrates says that "we will never get a precise answer using our present methods of argument—although there is another longer and fuller road that leads to such an answer" (435d). The Form of the Good provides the light they need to travel on the "longer and fuller road." However, Socrates' account of the good deals primarily with the problem of knowledge, the nature of reality, and how individuals can participate in it. If Plato believes that the central books in the *Republic*—that is to say the digression or the "longer and fuller road"—represent the solution to Thrasymachus' challenge (expanded on by Glaucon and Adeimantus), then he must believe that, at its core, the problem of justice is inextricably linked to the relationship between the individual soul and the nature of reality. If this is

[306] For example, Hesiod suggests that pleonectic aggression will be met with the divine sanction that justice eventually triumphs in human affairs. See *Works and Days*, 231-285.
[307] I say this because there is an element of the divine in Plato's conception of the Form of the Good.

true, then Thrasymachus' challenge is less an issue of character (though it is also this) than an issue of what Thrasymachus believes to be most *real*. And, as we've seen, the things Thrasymachus thinks are most real are: power, greed, domination, and violence. In this sense, Thrasymachus and Callicles are similar and Plato must find a response adequate to both attacks on justice.

Plato attempts to do this by having Socrates create a new metaphysics and epistemology that grounds his response to the immoralist challenge in the doctrine of the Forms. The Form of the Good replaces the traditional theonomic perspective that grounded justice as a matter of the gods' control and sanction. Socrates puts forth the Form of the Good as a new standard that makes individuals and cities moderate and restrained in the face of pleonectic opportunities. Instead of ruling according to base self-interest, the philosopher-kings rule through their knowledge of the universe. The analogies of the Sun, the Line and the Cave are the analogical means through which Socrates creates an edifice of knowledge with the Form of the Good as its fundamental object of desire. Their ability to participate in the truth and knowledge that flow from the Forms is what ensures the Guardians' virtue and legitimates their rule (484c-d, 502c-d, 534d-e). It is philosophy or the knowledge of nature that generates a set of transcendent norms and circumscribes political power to a small group of individuals whose desires are aimed at understanding the good. Justice is built into *Kallipolis* in part because political power is grounded in philosophic education or wisdom. And this education is only accessible to those few individuals with the ability to grasp the Form of the Good. The Form of the Good serves as a kind of transcendent philosophic sacred object that the philosopher-kings may apprehend through the education of their virtuous natures. The Form of the Good even defines the goodness of the gods. Human beings and the gods stand beneath the perfection and moral beauty of the forms. By doing this, Socrates

transforms the traditional ways of thinking about political virtue. Both human beings as well as gods are good and just because they are completely dedicated to virtue.

The *Kallipolis*, then, simultaneously draws our attention to and serves as a refutation of the politics of *pleonexia* that characterize Athenian imperialism. When Socrates initially lays out the analogy between the city and the individual soul, he begins with a very basic "healthy" city as a way of discovering justice in the relations between its inhabitants (368c-372d). The defining attribute of this "true city" is not simply its minimalism or self-sufficiency, but the fact that its citizens have few desires for things other than basic sustenance. Socrates description of the inhabitants' lives in the "true city" is worth revisiting:

> They'll produce bread, wine, clothes and shoes, won't they? They'll build houses, work naked and barefoot in the summer, and wear adequate clothing and shoes in the winter. For food, they'll knead and cook the flour and meal they've made from wheat and barley. They'll put their honest cakes and loaves on reeds or clean leaves, and, reclining on beds strewn with yew and myrtle, they'll feast with their children, drink their wine, and, crowned with wreaths, hymn the gods. They'll enjoy sex with one another but bear no more children than their resources allow, lest they fall into either poverty or war. (372a-b)

When Glaucon asks about what "delicacies" the citizens in the "true city" will have, Socrates lists: "salt, olives, cheese, boiled roots, and vegetables of the sort they cook in the country. We'll give them desserts, too, of course, consisting of figs, chick-peas, and beans, and they'll roast myrtle and acorns before the fire, drinking moderately" (372c). Because the desires of the inhabitants are moderate and they have few temptations to behave unjustly—like the temptation to acquire wealth—it is likely that this city and its inhabitants are just.

The desserts of the healthy and true city are inadequate for Glaucon (and presumably the other interlocutors), and he immediately characterizes this initial city as a

"city of pigs"—by which he means a city fit for animals rather than humans. The reason Glaucon gives for its unfitness is that it lacks the "delicacies and desserts that people have nowadays," by which he means, in particular, imperial Athens. Many scholars have noted the importance of this point in the dialogue. We can imagine that, were the Socrates from the *Gorgias* or the *Protagoras* present, he would attempt to persuade Glaucon that his desires for unnecessary luxuries damage both his own soul and his city. Here, however, Socrates encourages Glaucon to release his appetites and allows typical luxuries including ivory and gold into the city. This is why Socrates emphasizes the importance of imports to satisfy the needs of the inhabitants. Glaucon's objection, then, serves to underscore the *pleonexia* that has infected the Athenian youth. The luxurious city implies the need for expansion and, with it, war and conquest. Thus, Glaucon's objection carries with it the need for Guardians to protect the luxuries, and these Guardians will therefore require education about the manner in which this defense should occur. They will require the education of the rulers Socrates describes in Books VI and VII. And this will provide Socrates with an opportunity to show the chasm between the values of the philosopher-kings who rule *Kallipolis* and those who currently rule Athens.

There is no better example of how Socrates highlights this gap then in the requirement that the rulers have no private—that is to say individual—property (417a). Socrates' argument for the requirement of communism is that: "if they acquire private land, houses, and currency themselves, they will become…harsh tyrants instead of partners in dealing with their fellow citizens, with whom they will live on terms of mutual hatred and suspicion" (417a-b). For Socrates, private property is like anthrax—all it takes is a tiny bit of exposure to material goods in order to unshackle desire and corrupt those in charge of defending the city. Communism is required because, without it, the Guardians will abuse their authority in order to satisfy their material urges. Plato

emphasizes this point by having Adeimantus object that the Guardians will be less happy than other rulers because they will lack the accouterments that typically accompany power—"big houses [and]…furnishings to go along with them," in addition to gold and silver "and all the things that are thought to belong to people who are blessedly happy" (419a-b). Adeimantus here raises the fundamental moral and political problem with the *pleonexia* of imperial Athens—the use of power as a means to satisfy engorged material desires. Socrates' response to the challenge of *pleonexia*, posed in different ways by Callicles and Thrasymachus, is to exclude their desires from the social and political order. Let us briefly examine how he proposes to do this.

Socrates employs two primary vehicles to limit the rulers' ability for material self-aggrandizement: education and institutional arrangements. As we've seen, the requirement that the rulers hold property in common is a purposeful attempt to institutionally address the problem that rulers are by nature materially acquisitive and that they will use their power to expropriate wealth from those they rule. This concern over materialism is further reflected in Socrates' stress on the moderation of the philosopher-kings with respect to money (485e).[308] These characteristics of the *Republic* testify to Plato's concern over the relationship between rule and materialism. Indeed, the *Republic* responds to Thrasymachus and Callicles' lionization of power and *pleonexia* in part by requiring that rulers exercise their power not for their own benefit, but for the benefit of the ruled. For Plato, the argument that individuals or groups either do use political power for their own advantage, or, more strongly, that they *should* acquire political power in order to satisfy their greed is demonstrably false. Rulers, properly so called, and

[308] "A person like that [philosopher-king] will be temperate, then, and in no way a lover of money. After all, money and the big expenditures that go along with it are sought for the sake of things that other people may take seriously, but that he does not" (485e, Reeve translation).

educated in knowledge of the Form of the Good, will avoid ruling if at all possible, but will rule justly and to the benefit of the ruled once in power.

Plato underscores the uniqueness of his solution through his doctrine that holds the city as a whole responsible for the creation of destructive individuals. As Socrates' puts it:

> None of our present constitutions is worthy of the philosophic nature, and, as a result, this nature is perverted and altered, for, just as a foreign seed, sown in alien ground, is likely to be overcome by the native species and to fade away among them, so the philosophic nature fails to develop its full power and declines into a different character. (497b)

Central to Plato's education of just rulers is an environment in which their abilities and naturally virtuous characters can be effectively cultivated. In highlighting the link between education and justice, Plato indicts Athens for improperly educating its citizens (as we saw in the *Protagoras*). Because the Athenians live in a corrupt moral climate, they are unable to receive a true education—the external pleonectic influence is simply too pervasive. Plato's critique takes on a much sharper focus in connection with the Athenian dogma of *pleonexia* that we have seen in the previous chapters. Specifically, Athens provided a poor education by instilling in its citizens a perverted understanding about the nature of goodness, justice and truth. Throughout the Peloponnesian War, many of the Athenian elite embraced the view of their Ambassadors at Melos—that might makes right, power justifies the satisfaction of base desires, and that *pleonexia* is, at root, the fundamental truth of what's good for cities and individuals. And these lessons were likely well-learned and internalized by Athenians through their experience of empire. The analogy between cities and individual souls, then, is a reasonable way of understanding analogically how individuals internalize an understanding of what things are of the highest value and what behaviors are noble by participating in their civic

culture. For Plato, the Athenians have habituated themselves at the individual and collective level to believe in the goodness of power and greed through their experience of acquiring, governing, and dominating their empire. Glaucon's untamed desire for a luxurious city is a natural reflection of what happens to even the most noble youth in an environment of imperialism and greed.

By letting in Glaucon's pleonectic desire for more into the city, Socrates is able to introduce the need of an army to defend the city's territory and luxuries, as well as the need to acquire more land: "Won't we have to seize some of our neighbors' land, then, if we are to have enough for pasture and plowing? And won't our neighbors want to seize part of ours in turn, if they too have abandoned themselves to the endless acquisition of money and overstepped the limit of their necessary desires" (373d)?[309] The implication here is that the necessary or "natural" desires of the simple city are limited, whereas the pleonectic desires of the luxurious city are, as Thucydides' Pericles instructs, *limitless*. Glaucon, representing the best of the Athenian youth, is nonchalant in response to the need to dominate, saying: "That's completely inevitable" (373e). Having been reared in the context of the empire, Plato believes that the adoption of this kind of worldview is equally inevitable. That is, for Glaucon, the only city worth living in will, by definition, entail violence and greed. Simple trading relationships based on mutual need or purpose do not appear as possible solutions to the problems raised by the desire for luxuries. Perhaps this is because Glaucon already recognizes the potential limitlessness of desire. Socrates immediately tries to draw out the implications of Glaucon's view, linking *pleonexia* (especially its material manifestations) and war:

Socrates: And the next step will be war, Glaucon, don't you agree?

[309] Reeve translation.

Glaucon: I do.

> Socrates: Now, let's not say yet whether the effects of war are good or bad, but only that we have now found the origin of war: it comes from those same factors, the occurrence of which is the source of the greatest evil for cities and the individuals in them. (374e)[310]

This passage raises the familiar problem of the relationship between internal or domestic harmony and external greed. As we saw in Chapter Three, Pericles' solution is to unleash pleonectic desires, but to direct them toward *other* cities. Socrates now reveals what this understanding fundamentally entails—turning the Guardians into "noble hounds" (375a).[311] For Plato, this is the consequence of Pericles' solution—a warping of human nature that cannot be expected to succeed (a point with which, I believe, Thucydides' concurs). Socrates' solution is radically different. In Book IV, he argues that justice is psychic health—understood as the proper ordering of the tripartite soul. In both city and the soul, justice is the virtue that establishes harmony and internal strength through the proper ordering of the parts or classes. However, the ordering itself is merely internal alignment, and Socrates doesn't show that that the psychically healthy soul or the well-ordered city will be just in its relations with others until he sets down his metaphysics in Books V-VII. The issue of rule (*arche*) is what helps guarantee this, for it is only when reason rules the city and the individual through its understanding of the Form of the Good that the individual or the city become just. Without this critical amendment, individuals and cities might be powerful (*dunamis*) in their relationships with others, but not necessarily just.

Interestingly, in his discussion of the characteristics of the Guardians, Socrates highlights the importance of the friend/enemy distinction. The Guardians must have the "philosophic" nature of the guard dog, which is the ability to distinguish between friends

[310] Reeve translation.
[311] Reeve translation.

and enemies. This is, of course, one of the oldest principles of Greek (though not simply Greek) ethics and, as we saw in our discussion of Book I, how Polemarchus spins Simonides' maxim of justice as "giving to each what is owed to him" (331e). Yet, for this principle to work for Socrates, he must redefine the distinction in a way that makes "friend" into the just or virtuous and "enemy" into the unjust or those lacking in virtue. This is why he organizes *Kallipolis* in such a way as to *guarantee* that its citizens demonstrate the virtues, because in this way he ensures that the Guardians will be internally gentle. However, Socrates does not directly address how the Guardians will treat others. Presumably, their indirect participation in the Form of the Good, as well as their self-control will prevent the Guardians from desiring (and trying to grasp) what is not theirs.

However, Socrates' original remarks about warfare and the creation of the army raise unsettling questions in the context of Athenian imperialism. Returning to it in light of the *Republic* as a whole, it reads like a lament over the gap between the ideal of justice and the pervasive and very real injustice of Athenian imperialism. And we are chastened (and perhaps a bit disgusted) by the ease or apparent thoughtlessness with which Glaucon moves toward injustice. Nevertheless, Plato believes that this is the probable outcome from the Protagorean or Periclean political education. I believe that the fact that this occurs early in the construction of the city in speech also reflects Plato's view that knowledge of vice is a prerequisite for the ascent to virtue. To borrow Protagoras' metaphor, we must know how and in what direction the wood is bent in order to know the best way to straighten it. Seen in this light, we can understand the *Republic* as an extended meditation on the struggle to balance individual freedom and virtue with the social and political need for virtue to be an externally-directed and shared activity in cities comprised of individuals with competing interests.

It is also instructive to recognize that Plato's cultural critique is not merely confined to Athenian imperialism but is much more sweeping, taking in its grasp all existing cities. After constructing *Kallipolis*, Socrates returns to the theme of materialism and *pleonexia* in his analysis of the "defective" individual and regimes types in Books VIII and IX. Plato explicitly details the underlying causes that generate political conflict. After *Kallipolis* is undermined through a mathematical error, its rulers begin to exhibit the virtues of character common to those with iron and bronze souls (in keeping with the myth of the metals. This naturally leads to war, hostility and faction (*stasis*) over property and material goods as well as individual freedom, since the factions come together to "enslave and hold as serfs and servants those whom they previously guarded as free friends…and occupy themselves with war and with guarding against those whom they've enslaved" (547b-c). Each phase of individual and regime dissolution is characterized by control over private property and the instrumental use of power. For example, the (older) timocrat becomes consumed with a lust for money, "passionately adoring gold and silver in secret" (548a). This leads to the socially damaging concentration of wealth in a small number of individuals and families (548a-550d). Living in a city that loves wealth over all other things, the oligarch—in one of Plato's more memorable images—elevates his appetite for wealth to a "throne" in his soul, subsuming all other considerations to his lust to acquire wealth "or what ever might contribute to getting it" (553d). As the number of poor increase, they become an increasingly powerful force from their sheer numbers and eventually take power, establishing equality for those who are left, after "killing some of their opponents and expelling others" (557a).[312] Under this democracy, the democratic leaders "take the

[312] We are, of course, again reminded of Thucydides' description of the Corcyrean *stasis*.

wealth of the rich and distributing it to the people, keep the greater part for themselves" (565a). Finally, the tyrant, elevated to power by the people against the rich, eventually turns on the people, enslaving them to satisfy his own greed. Socrates argues that the tyrant lives the most unhappy life because he is "compelled" to be unjust to his people who, naturally, he comes to fear. As a result, he lives "full of fear, convulsions, and pains throughout his life" (579d-e). And there is no escape for the tyrant, because his utter lack of moderation and self-control make him a permanent "slave" to his desires (579d-e).

We should read Plato's analysis of the dissolution of individuals and regimes in light of his presentation of his most infamous immoralists (Thrasymachus and Callicles) and alongside his description of *Kallipolis*. Plato rejects Thrasymachus and Callicles' vision of a politics of unrestrained appetite and greed for one that grounds political power in those individuals who are the most fair-minded and self-controlled. His discussion of regime dissolution is simply the flip side of the construction of *Kallipolis*. Books VIII and IX show precisely why banishing *pleonexia* from the rulers as well as the ruling institutions of *Kallipolis* was necessary.[313] Unlike Pericles, who sought to harmonize *pleonexia* with civic virtue and harmony, Plato directs his efforts toward eliminating *pleonexia* and its inevitably destructive consequences from his own political vision.

With this in mind, let us see if we can, by way of conclusion, see how Thucydides approaches this issue. As with Plato, Thucydides is concerned with an analysis of the Athenian national soul or character: its fundamental impulses and traits, its characteristic weaknesses and strengths, and the relationship between its character and politics. Thucydides wanted to unearth the significance of the Athenian Empire to the Greek

[313] Note that material goods are not banished entirely from *Kallipolis*—Plato is most concerned with the effect of materialism on the rulers. Materialism is particularly problematic when it comes to rule, but perhaps less so when it comes to life as a whole.

world—why and how it operated, and what it tells us about the political (and human) condition. What, then, might he have to say in response to Plato's critique? Before beginning his narrative of the war proper, Thucydides gives a brief twenty-chapter account of the times before his own, the so-called "Archaeology." While part of his purpose here is to demonstrate the relative unimportance of the past when compared with the present, the underlying theme of the Archaeology, and its culmination, is the development of Athenian imperialism. The past history of Greece is unimportant because it did not permit the flourishing of politics and large-scale powers.

As Thucydides attempts to contrast the greatness of the Peloponnesian War with prior Greek wars, he focuses our attention in the *History's* first paragraph on the magnitude of the Peloponnesian War: "This was certainly the greatest disturbance to affect the Hellenes and a considerable number of barbarians—one might say the majority of mankind" (1.1). In setting off the Peloponnesian War from Homeric Epic and Herodotus' *History*, Thucydides relies on the magnitude of the suffering as evidence of the war's greatness: "But this war not only was great by its extended length but also was accompanied by such sufferings as never afflicted Hellas in any comparable period of time" (1.23). Indeed, given what Thucydides chooses to focus on in the Archaeology, coupled with his later reports on early Greece, we can see that the purpose of the Archaeology is to focus the reader's mind on imperialism from the outset. Thucydides praises Sparta's custom of putting down tyrannies and notes the unusual way in which the Athenians confronted the Persian threat: "resolving as the Persians advanced to abandon their city and embarking on their ships after they had cleaned it out, [the Athenians] became a seaborne people" (1.18). When Thucydides discusses the events giving rise to the Peloponnesian (Spartan) and Delian (Athenian) Leagues, he carefully points out that the Spartans "did not dominate their allies by making them pay tribute" as opposed to the

Athenians' policy of "taking over the fleets of the allied cities…and assigning money for each to pay" (1.19). For Thucydides, this difference reflects Athens' pleonectic nature. Right from the beginning, then, Thucydides draws our attention to the grasping, energetic character of Athens and the stable, motionless character of Sparta—which, as Victor David Hanson observes, represent "the poles of human and not just Greek experience."[314]

It is no accident that Thucydides' whirlwind tour of Greek history highlights elements directly related to the rise of Athenian imperialism and the grasping desire that helped bring it into being. More than this, however, Thucydides begins to focus our attention to the relationship between imperialism and justice. In the Archaeology, Thucydides seems to be silent about the justice or injustice of the past. The remote past appears innocent of questions of right.[315] Indeed, the word *justice* arises only in the claims and counterclaims of the various combatants, and the supposed justice of prior wars is only due to the beautification of the poets. Yet, as Thucydides tells it, progress in the Archaeology is progress with respect to justice (at least *within* cities). Beginning with Greece at its most primitive (before it was even called Greece), Thucydides tells of frequent migrations, and tribes that often abandoned their homes "under pressure from anyone more numerous at the time" (1.2). Of course, people had little reason to stay in one place, given that there was no stability, commerce, secure communication or much cultivation beyond subsistence. People lived from day to day, providing for life's necessities, which could be supplied in one place just as well as another. This state of affairs was one in which the power of the stronger governed. Nowhere was this better reflected than in the fact that everyone wore arms as a part of everyday life as an article

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[314] Victor David Hanson, "Introduction," in *The Landmark Thucydides : A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, ed. Robert B. Strassler (New York: Free Press, 1996), xi.
[315] Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides*: 30.

of clothing. According to Thucydides, nothing of much import happened until the Greeks took to the sea. By writing the history of naval power in Greece in the first chapters of the *History*, Thucydides foreshadows the coming power of Athens.

For example, Thucydides begins the fourth chapter by noting that: "Minos was the earliest known in our tradition to acquire a navy, and he controlled most of the sea now called Hellenic, ruled the Cyclades, and…cleared the seas of piracy as far as possible to direct revenues toward himself instead" (1.4). Minos used his navy, then, to help establish a tyranny, set up his sons as governors in the islands, and put down piracy in order to better acquire revenue for himself. In other words, Minos needed capital. For Thucydides, *this* is the relevant fact that demands our attention, not whether Minos was Zeus' son and received instruction from him about creating Crete's laws or how many Athenian children the Minotaur famously ate. Suppressing piracy permitted people to populate the coastal regions without fear and begin to settle down, acquire wealth, and even build walls. The Greeks, beginning with the Athenians, set aside their weapons. According to Thucydides, one of the characteristics that helped make this possible was that the wealthy adopted a more moderate attitude toward the people (1.6). The invention, as it were, of moderation was an essential prerequisite for the establishment of genuine political community. However, though moderation was indeed critical, interest and necessity formed the bulk of the foundation of human progress. Indeed, law and order were a byproduct of conquest, not negotiation. Thucydides is clear about the price that was paid for this stability: "Love of profit caused the weaker to submit to the domination of the strong and the more powerful, with their abundant wealth, to make the smaller cities subject to them" (1.8).[316] The fundamental relation between the strong and

[316] Paul Woodruff's translation is perhaps clearer: "And, as those who lived along the coasts became more addicted to acquiring wealth, their settlements became more stable…In their desire for gain, the weaker cities let themselves be subject to the stronger ones, while the more powerful cities used their surplus

the weak changed form, but its essence remained the same. By the end of the eighth chapter, Thucydides has already introduced us to the core elements of what will become Athenian imperialism: naval power, wealth (especially through tribute), and rule over the islands.[317] It is worth noting that Thucydides here points out the *benefits* of imperialism for its subjects. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that the archetype for Athenian imperialism is one of the most brutal tyrants in the history of Greece. Nor should we forget that Minos' fleet governed the seas in a manner akin to the Athenian navy.

In addition to Minos, Thucydides tells us that Agamemnon, the Corinthian tyrants, Polycrates of Samos, and the Persian Kings Darius and Cyrus gained dominion in similar fashions. For example, Thucydides asserts that: "Agamemnon, as I see it, assembled his force more by surpassing his contemporaries in power than by leading suitors bound by the oaths to Tyndareus" (1.9). That is, the animating factor of the Trojan War was fear, not *eros*—the Trojan War had little to do with Briseis or Helen. Thucydides begins his *History*, then, by redefining what counts as important historical forces. The individual or psychological truths laid out by Homer and Herodotus are replaced by Thucydides with patterns of human behavior. Concerns with memorializing great individuals are replaced with an account of the type. As Peter Pouncy points out, individual glory retreats in the face of: "large movements of power, by aggression or alliance…[when the locus of power] is found in states and their resources rather than in individuals."[318] The movement of the Archaeology goes from the earliest stages when

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wealth to bring weaker ones under their rule." Thucydides, *On Justice, Power, and Human Nature: The Essence of Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War*: 5.

[317] Romilly, *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism*: 67. Ober modifies this slightly to be: walls, money, and warships. Ober, "Thucydides *Theoretikos*/Thucydides *Histor*: Realist Theory and the Challenge of History."

[318] Pouncey, *The Necessities of War: A Study of Thucydides' Pessimism*: 10.

homes were unstable to the later stage when governments were; the material progress evident in this historical development is aligned with political unity and boosted by naval power. As David Grene observes: "Money, commerce, naval power, and large-scale centralization are the necessary steps on the road which leads from a condition of simple barbarism to the developed and sophisticated empire of Athens."[319] The remainder of the selective survey of Greece is really nothing more than crash-course on the history of sea power in the Aegean, anticipating Athens' rise to dominance. There is no discussion of cultural, artistic, or intellectual achievements. These are relevant to Thucydides only insofar as they provide necessary conditions for the development of power. And for Thucydides, power is most of all characterized by the possession of surplus wealth and vast territory supported by a strong fleet. Naturally, since Thucydides measures previous civilizations by the standards of Athenian imperialism, they are all, to one extent or another, inadequate.[320]

As we've seen, Thucydides asserts that the conflict between Athens and Sparta was inevitable due to the fear the rise of Athenian power generated in the Spartans.[321] Put differently, war become inescapable once Athens took imperial form. Her drive—most clearly reflected in her abandonment of divine and moral restraints at Melos—made her a threat to everyone in her orbit. At the same time, Athenian energy is the source of one of her most significant inventions—freedom. In his Funeral Oration, Pericles identifies the freedom bestowed on individuals by Athens as one of her defining virtues.

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[319] David Grene, *Greek Political Theory: The Image of Man in Thucydides and Plato* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 49.

[320] Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, trans. Gilbert Highet, 2nd ed., 3 vols., vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 386.

[321] Ostwald notes that in Thucydides' text, the use of *ananke* here lacks a direct object and argues that Thucydides means for us to understand *ananke* to apply equally to Athenian growth and Spartan fear. Martin Ostwald, *Ananke in Thucydides* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

Athenians live as they please. However, while they enjoy this freedom, Pericles claims that they simultaneously respect written and unwritten laws (or morality). And they are as willing and able to defend Athens as citizens of cities, like Sparta, that achieve the same effect by subjecting their citizens to extreme discipline and secrecy. As a result, Athenian "daring…[has] compelled every sea and land to become open" to them (2.41).

The Corinthians at the Congress at Sparta make this point, but from the other side of the imperial lens. In trying to incite the Spartans to war, they describe the Athenian character as one on unrelenting expansionism. Athenians are decisive and love to venture away from home because they expect to gain something in their travels. Athenians are quick to pursue victories and slow to retreat in defeat. They put their minds and sacrifice their bodies without hesitation in the service of Athens. The Corinthians sum up the Athenian character: "they were born to have no peace themselves and allow it to no one else" (1.70). The Athenian character, then, is of an unprecedented kind: Athenian freedom generates an externally-directed kind of power that ultimately threatens the liberty of the other Greeks. This view is corroborated by Thucydides himself in his discussion of the rise of Athenian imperialism over the fifty years before the Peloponnesian War (1.89-1.138). What begins as a slow expansion in the Aegean as a defense against the Persian threat transforms into what appears to be a purposeless endeavor of expansion for expansion's sake.

The Athenians defend their expansionism and empire at the Congress at Sparta by giving an account of human nature and its effect on how cities behave. According to the Athenians, every city with sufficient power will advance their power over weaker ones as a result of the universal compulsions (or motivations) of fear, honor, and self-interest (1.75-1.76). The Athenians say that the most salient factor that contributed to their imperialism was their fear of Sparta. As for honor and interest, these appear to be weaker

justifications for empire—at least if they are the "universal" compulsions the Athenians claim. As the Athenians themselves point out, Sparta did not maintain leadership of the alliance following the Persian War. That is, the Spartans were evidently not *compelled* to retain leadership. It seems that perhaps the only way to make sense of the Athenian argument is to suppose that the stated compulsions apply only to Athenians. But if this is so—given the linkage between imperialism and justice—what is the difference between saying that different men are differently compelled toward empire, and saying that some men are just and others are not?

As they do throughout the *History*, the Athenians claim that their actions are in accord with human nature, since the strong always subject the weak. No one with sufficient strength ever resorts to arguments from justice, just as the weak only employ arguments from justice because they have insufficient strength. Thus, according to the Athenians, arguments from justice are nothing other than elaborately wrapped assertions of self-interest. This is not to say that the Athenians deny the existence of justice or even its irrelevance. Rather, they argue that justice only becomes relevant when both sides in a dispute lack sufficient power to unilaterally impose their will on the other. This is qualitatively different from suggesting, for example, that might makes right. Indeed, the Athenians maintain that they deserve kudos for acting more justly than their power requires. If might made right, the Athenians would deserve no such praise. It is important to note as well that the Athenians do not hold that their imperialism is just—full-stop—only that no city acts with more justice than Athens.

If the Athenians are correct, strength is a *prerequisite* for justice. Only those with superior power can be unambiguously just, because weaker cities' claims to justice are merely expressions of the self-interest of the weak. But the Athenian account of justice is simultaneously an illustration of Athenian hubris. The envoys admit that their empire is

not founded upon justice, but it is this very candor with respect to justice that makes the Athenians more just than everyone else. Paradoxically, the observation and awareness that their imperialism is unmoored from any standard of justice is precisely what makes them attend more to issues of justice than other tyrants. Since their rule is not just, they rule more moderately or justly.

Thucydides subjects the Athenian account to serious criticism in his account of the rise of Athenian imperialism. He emphasizes the critical role of Themistocles, who convinced the Athenians to fortify the Piraeus. Like Pericles, "he also considered the Piraeus more valuable than the city above it" (1.93). By drawing this parallel with Pericles, who led Athens to the height of her power, Thucydides encourages us to see Themistocles as the progenitor of Athenian imperialism—encouraging Athens down the path of expansionism through naval supremacy that gave rise to both her glory and her demise.[322] In Thucydides' narrative, Themistocles embodies the Athenian daring and energy that the Corinthians both admire and rail against. In his account of Athens' rise, Thucydides demonstrates that, in spite of their appeal at Sparta that Athens was "compelled" to imperialism, the facts do not support their claim. If their initial steps toward empire sprang from the motive of fear of Persia, their motive transformed rather quickly into a desire for more (*pleonexia*) that sprang from self-interest. Fear played at best a small role in Athenian imperialism. What's more, the Athenian claim of compulsion consisting of fear, honor, and interest is difficult to reconcile in the following sense: If you are *compelled* (*ananke*) to do something, then in what way can it be said that what you are doing is either freely chosen or honorable? The Athenians argue—strangely, I think—that honor (*time*) is one of the compulsions that pushed them toward

[322] As brilliant as Themistocles is, he is utterly blind to seeing the dangers of his strategy. Of course, this statement is applicable to everyone in the *History* (except perhaps Archidamus).

imperialism, and they further claim that they have yielded to compulsion less than others. This is why they claim that Athens is more just than their power requires (1.76).

To help us understand why the Athenians make these claims, let us return to Pericles' Funeral Oration, which is a paean to Athenian beauty and greatness. Interestingly, the only time Pericles uses a form of the word "compel" (*ananke*) in the Funeral Oration is when he describes what the Athenian empire has done throughout Greece: "we have compelled every sea and land to become open to our daring and populated every region with lasting monuments of our acts of harm and good" (2.41).[323] The understanding of compulsion as requiring aggressive power politics and imperialism has become, at this point, a self-fulfilling prophecy, which Pericles quickly links to *eros*. In perhaps the most commented on section of the address, Pericles urges the Athenians to gaze upon Athens' power, and become lovers of it.[324] As we have seen, this is a similar understanding of *eros* as a physical compulsion (*ananke*) as the one Gorgias put forth in his *Encomium of Helen*.[325] However, this Gorgian or sophistic understanding of *eros* and *ananke* has moral repercussions that are different from the more traditional understanding of *eros* as a kind of divine visitation.[326] The word *eros* appears in reference to politics on three occasions in Thucydides' *History*: Pericles' Funeral Oration in Book II, the Mytilenean Debate in Book III, and the Sicilian Expedition in Book VI. In order to see

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[323] The word Pericles uses is *katanankazo*.

[324] As we discussed in Chapter Three, it is unclear whether Pericles is referring to the city's power or the city herself.

[325] See Chapter Two for a more complete discussion.

[326] Paul Ludwig has written what I believe is the most comprehensive analysis of political *eros* in Greek literature. Paul W. Ludwig, *Eros and Polis: Desire and Community in Greek Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

how Thucydides understands the relationship between *eros* and imperialism, let us examine these three episodes.[327]

In the Sicilian Expedition we see Athenian *eros* in full flower. According to Thucydides himself, the Athenians are "in love" with the idea of conquering the island. In Book IV we read (ironically to the reader of the Melian Dialogue) about an early Athenian hopefulness (*elpis*) or over-confidence of taking control of Sicily. And in Book VI, Thucydides says in his own name that the decision to launch the armada was the result of such passions as *eros* (love, desire) and appetite (*epithumia*)—precisely the kinds of passion that *sophrosune* or moderation is supposed to hold in check (6.24). Sicily is an object of Athenian desire throughout the *History*, and the Athenians' attempt to subdue the island is an archetype of their *pleonexia*. As the Syracusan leader Hermocrates describes it, the Athenians' attack: "out of longing for the good things in Sicily, which we [the various Sicilian cities] possess in common…For the Athenians to reach for more and lay plans in this way, one can make every allowance, and I do not blame those who wish to rule" (4.61). Hermocrates' understanding of Athenian ambition is perhaps a way station on the path from the desire for material goods to the desire to dominate others.[328] Prior to the Melian Dialogue and the Sicilian Expedition, Athenian imperialism may have simply been a means through which to acquire material goods. However, by positioning the Melian Dialogue immediately before the Sicilian Expedition in his narrative, Thucydides invites us to consider the ideology exposed by the Melian

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[327] I recognize that many commentators do not usually treat *eros* as an essential concept in Thucydides (perhaps because he doesn't frequently use the term). However, I think this is a mistake, given its explicit importance in three of the most crucial episodes in the *History*, as well as its implicit role in many others. The release of *eros* is what enables Athenian greatness as well as sends her to ruin. I thank Thomas Pangle for drawing my attention to these three passages.

[328] We are left to wonder whether Pericles could have held the Athenians' *pleonexia* in check.

slaughter as a prelude to the Sicilian disaster and, hence, as reflecting the lack of self-control that finally led to the total annihilation of Athenian forces.

By the time of the Sicilian Expedition, Athenian desire no longer is confined to obtaining material goods, but—as Callicles or Thrasymachus might advise—has expanded to encompass a desire for power for its own sake. In his description of the massive size and diversity of Sicily, Thucydides remarks: "against a place of this size the Athenians were bent on campaigning, their eagerness for complete conquest the truest cause" (6.6). Athenian leaders reflect the demos' *pleonexia* in the policies they propose, with the result that Athens' *eros* quickly overreaches her power. In contrast to the Periclean insistence on *collective* glory through his ingenious, but unsuccessful attempt to harmonize the public and private, Athens' power is now primarily a means for private advantage. Indeed, Alcibiades' desire to become one of the leaders of the Sicilian Expedition helps illustrate how far the Athenians have come. Alcibiades represents the Athenian character taken to its logical extreme. Thucydides says that Alcibiades desired to lead the expedition out of his hope (*elpis*) to acquire money (of which he was perilously short due to his profligate spending) and desire for esteem. Alcibiades combines individual/material and political *pleonexia* in a single man.[329] As Thucydides describes him, Alcibiades: "was above all eager to take command and hoped that this would enable him to conquer both Sicily and Carthage, and that by succeeding he would at the same time add to his personal wealth as well as prestige" (6.15). Here Thucydides confirms the totality of Alcibiades' graspingness, that Alcibiades was simply using the city as his instrument for wealth and glory. Moreover, he recapitulates (in marginally different order) his familiar equation of—*arche*, *pleonexia*, and *philotimia*—in a manner

[329] The most thorough treatment of Alcibiades' ambition that I am aware of is Forde, *The Ambition to Rule: Alcibiades and the Politics of Imperialism in Thucydides*. ibid.; Victoria Wohl, "The Eros of Alcibiades," *Classical Antiquity* 18, no. 2 (1999).

recalling his account of the Corcyrean *stasis*. By echoing Corcyra, Thucydides artfully suggests that Alcibiades' behavior will be responsible for Athens' *stasis* (or at least political breakdown), generated by his individual lust for money and glory. The days of Pericles have long since departed. No longer will nameless individuals give up their lives in a collective effort for the good of the whole city. Instead, the kind of self-interest that drives Alcibiades to seek personal profit and aggrandizement on a grand scale comes to jeopardize Athens' very existence—Athens herself comes to embody Alcibiadean drives.

We should note exactly how narrow Alcibiades' conception of self-interest really is. For him, self-interest is understood as acquiring material goods and glory for oneself, independent of the consequences for other citizens or the city as a whole. Instead of considering the city's welfare as primary, like Pericles, Alcibiades believes that the city's good is subordinate to his own. For example, he argues—openly in the Assembly—that his winning display at Olympia benefited Athens, rather than himself and his family, by presenting the other Greeks with an example of Athenian power (6.16). Thucydides casts doubt on Alcibiades' claims, suggesting that in spite of the obvious rhetorical advantages such an argument might have, Alcibiades always puts himself first (6.15). The consequences of his leadership are plain: he will use his public rhetoric to encourage and legitimize the pursuit of self-interest, even when it conflicts with the city's interest. Unsurprisingly, these desires provoked distrust among the Athenians with respect to him, since many thought he was attempting to become the tyrant of Athens (6.15). According to Thucydides, most people recognized that Alcibiades' desires outran his means, "and to a great extent it was this which destroyed the Athenian city. The masses, frightened by the magnitude of his license in conducting his personal life and of his aims in absolutely everything he did, whatever it was, developed hostility toward him as an aspiring tyrant" (6.15). In a way, Alcibiades becomes a kind of Thucydidean Callicles or Thrasymachus.

The Athenians are alarmed precisely because Alcibiades' excessive desire for more threatens their own possessions and, more importantly, their possession of the city. He embodies the Athenian national character but turns his *pleonexia* inward against the Athenians themselves.[330] Like Callicles and Thrasymachus, he is ambitious both to control the city and to acquire everything he desires. Thucydides here connects the city and the individual: Athens' external imperialism with the necessary trust and harmony to maintain the *polis* from within. Despite Nicias' best efforts to dissuade the Athenians from invading Sicily, "a passion for the expedition afflicted everyone alike" (6.24). The underpinning of Athenian imperialism—outwardly directed *pleonexia*—depended on equality and fairness inside Athens for its success. Ironically, it is the very equality and fairness inside the city that enables and sustains the Athenian aggressiveness against other Greeks. Once the cement that had previously bound the community together disintegrated, Athens was on her way to becoming Corcyra. Though it does not yet reach the apocalypse at Corcyra, Alcibiades moves Athens close to the brink by rejecting Pericles' model of democratic leadership.

Alcibiades reverses the democratic norms that formerly bound Athenians together as a political community. In his speech before the expedition, Alcibiades ridicules the equality that had helped engender Athenian unity and empire: "There's no injustice in being above equality if you think well of yourself…If a man will not even greet us when we are down on our luck, then, when things go well for us, he should be equally content if we look down on him" (6.16).[331] If Alcibiades' pleonectic desires have created mistrust among Athenians, then his public rejection of the Athenian ideal of equality only

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[330] Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides*: 123-26.

[331] Woodruff translation. Lattimore renders the last passage: "so just as we are not hailed when we are unfortunate, let all submit to the arrogance of the successful."

strengthens their mistrust and, more importantly, encourages Athenians to look after their own interests instead of those of a *polis* that is fragmenting along the lines of self-interest.[332]

Alcibiades strategy is simple but to the point: he argues that Athens' *pleonexia* actually coincides with national security interests. In his opinion, the Athenians cannot calculate "like housekeepers" how much empire they would like to have. They must either continue to export conquest or else become subject to another's dominion. What's more, Athenian security will be the most sure if Athenians try to perfect their *current* character and customs in spite of their flaws (6.18). This is tantamount to arguing that Athens' most well-known characteristic and custom, *pleonexia*, is the best mechanism through which to secure her future prosperity and security. Rejecting *pleonexia* will lead to Athenian ruin. Like Callicles and Thrasymachus, Alcibiades argues for expanding desires and acquiring the power to satisfy as many of them as possible. Rather than attempt to moderate the *demos'* excessive desires like Pericles, Alcibiades inflames them. Although Alcibiades can imitate Pericles' rhetoric—for example, his claim that the city is strongest when "the lowly, the average, and the extremely gifted…are all combined"—he neglects Pericles' content. That is, for Alcibiades, *pleonexia* becomes nothing other than greed with a view to individual profit rather than a glory that attaches to both the individual and common good. Thucydides describes the various motivations that animate the decision to attack Sicily: "the old men hoped to subdue the place they went to…the young men were longing to see and study a far-off country…while the great mass of people, including the military, expected not only to gain their wages by it for the time

[332] Note that in his debate with Alcibiades, Nicias himself encourages fragmentation by exhorting the older men in the Assembly to oppose the proposals of the young (6.13). He encourages his older followers "to avoid sharing the fatal desire for the faraway that afflicts the young by understanding that there is very little success won by craving but a great deal by foresight" (6.13).

being, but to win such power [or domination] that their salaries would go on forever" (6.24).[333] Equality in the Assembly has been sacrificed at the altar of greed; because of "this vehement desire…anyone who did not favor the expedition kept quiet out of fear that if he held up his hand in opposition he would be thought to harbor ill will against the city" (6.24).

As is well known, the expedition was an utter disaster. Interestingly, however, Thucydides suggests that the expedition could have succeeded. In his diagnosis, its failure was due to "private quarrels" at the expense of the public good rather than "mistaking the power of those they attacked" (2.65). Note that Thucydides puts forth this judgment in his eulogy to Pericles in Book II. Put bluntly, by the time of the expedition, it was already too late—the seed of Athens' demise had already blossomed. The way Thucydides interleaves his narrative episodes further encourages us to see this. As we noted in Chapter One, Thucydides introduces the Sicilian Expedition in the very next sentence after the slaughter of the Melians: "During the same winter, the Athenians wanted to sail to Sicily again with a larger force than the one under Laches and Eurymedon [discussed in Book IV] and subjugate it if possible" (6.1). Abandoning any pretense to justice, honor, or nobility, the Athenian Ambassadors put forth the simple, ruthless argument that those with power do as they wish, and they apply this view to the gods themselves. That is, according to the Athenians, the gods behave as the Athenians do and, therefore, can also be understood as tyrants (5.105). While the Athenians still insist that they are more reasonable or moderate than their power requires—their reasonableness or moderation is that of a tyrant (5.111). The truth of Athenian imperialism is finally revealed as brutish tyranny (though the Athenians have deluded

[333] Woodruff translation, brackets mine.

themselves to such a degree as to be unable to see it). The beauty that Pericles offers in his Funeral Oration has turned into the ugliness of tyranny and empire. The "lovers of nobility with restraint, and lovers of wisdom without any softening of character" have faded from view (2.40).[334] Periclean *eros* has transformed into unbridled *pleonexia*.[335] Pericles himself apparently recognized the folly of his erotic approach to politics after witnessing the dissolution of social norms during the plague. In his final speech, he recognizes the reality of the Athenian imperial project, acknowledging that the empire is a now a like tyranny: "though it may have been thought unjust to seize, it is now unsafe to surrender" (2.63).[336]

There is little doubt that Thucydides encourages us to see in Alcibiades the likely consequences of Pericles' worldview. Michael Vickers suggests that Thucydides intends the Athenian Ambassadors at Melos to represent Alcibiades "to the knowing reader."[337] Though Alcibiades was busy competing in the chariot races in Olympia during the Melian slaughter, Vickers argues that Alcibiades was behind both the expedition and the delivered punishment, going so far as to say the attack "may even have taken place on account of a personal grudge on the part of Alcibiades."[338] Vickers argument is quite complicated, but it is worth summarizing some of his evidence. Though Alcibiades leaves the scene after attacking Argos in the chapter immediately before the Melian Dialogue, Thucydides does not explicitly mention his departure, leaving it to the reader to

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[334] Woodruff translation.

[335] Thucydides' placement of the story of Harmodius and Aristogeiton in the middle of the Sicilian Expedition is surely designed to further this point. Overthrowing the tyranny was subordinate to Aristogeiton's primary purpose—holding on to Harmodius (6.54). As Paul Ludwig notes: "Harmonius and Aristogeiton harmed the city in furtherance of their own private eros when the effects of their love spilled over into public affairs." Ludwig, *Eros and Polis: Desire and Community in Greek Political Theory*: 162.

[336] Woodruff translation.

[337] Michael Vickers, "Alcibiades and Melos: Thucydides 5.84-116," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 48, no. 3 (1999): 275.

[338] Ibid.

deduce this fact. Vickers claims that Alcibiades' "moral presence" is reflected in the composition of the attacking forces. Among the make-up of forces that attacked Melos were "Alcibiades' regular 'handmaidens,'"—the Chians and Lesbians—who were simultaneously supplying Alcibiades with animals for his enormous sacrifice at the games.[339] Furthermore, Alcibiades was likely present during the initial attack on Melos in 425 and probably considered it unfinished business. Since the method the Athenians chose to adopt toward Melos was coercion, the language of the Athenian Ambassadors "possessed a certain Alcibiadean resonance" though their use of *ananke*.[340] As Vickers puts it:

> The knowing contemporary reader will thus have spoken the words of 'the Athenians' *traulizon*, or pronouncing rho and lambda. If the opening words of 'the Athenians' first speech were thus lambdacized, they would quickly produce a disagreeable jingle: *pros to plethos* is the kind of expression for which Alcibiades' teacher Gorgias was famous but which good Attic stylists tried to avoid.[341]

Teisias, one of the generals at Melos, was close to Alcibiades and the word Thucydides uses to characterize the action that Teisias and his co-general Cleomedes were intending to carry out on the Melian territory is *adikein* ("to treat it with injustice," 5.84). As we've seen, this is the word used to describe how respectable Athenians viewed Alcibiades' personal conduct during the time.[342] Finally, the way in which the

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[339] Horses were a passion for Alcibiades (Thucydides reports that he kept a stud farm at 6.15), and the Olympic chariot title would naturally be a great plume in his hat. Alcibiades infamously entered seven teams (by far the most ever recorded—including one that he reputedly stole) and took first, second and fourth places (6.16).

[340] Vickers cites Ostwald's observation that "the whole weight of imperial *ananke*" is articulated in the Melian Dialogue. Vickers, "Alcibiades and Melos: Thucydides 5.84-116," 276. Ostwald, *Ananke in Thucydides*: 40.

[341] Vickers, "Alcibiades and Melos: Thucydides 5.84-116," 277. Vickers also observes that the Athenian Ambassadors speak in an Alcibiadean manner, citing the frequency rate of initial *kai*'s (i.e., using *kai* to begin sentences—which was an Alcibiadean signature) as statistically identical to those of Alcibiades' speeches in the *History*.

[342] Plutarch reports that: "Faced with all these aspects of his [Alcibiades'] behaviour, the notable men of Athens combined feelings of abhorrence and disgust with fear of his haughty and lawless attitude, which

Ambassadors say they understand why the Melians want to hold the debate in private rather than before the people is nearly identical to the way Thucydides describes Alcibiades' deception of the Spartan delegation to Athens in 420 (5.45). Vickers' argument is consistent with Plutarch's account of Alcibiades' influence in the Melian affair, claiming that Alcibiades:

> picked a woman from among the Melian prisoners of war, installed her in his house, and brought up a child she bore him. They described this as an act of kindness, but the problem was that he was more responsible than anyone for the slaughter of all the adult male inhabitants of Melos, since he had spoken out in support of the decree.[343]

By linking Alcibiades with typical sophist philosophical ideas and practices of the 420s—when Gorgias first came to Athens—Thucydides makes the point that these views had now become sufficiently well accepted that they could be made openly to the *demos*.

Let us conclude by examining the third discussion of political *eros* in Thucydides' *History*, put forth by the otherwise unknown orator Diodotus in the debate over the appropriate punishment for the Mytileneans after some of them rebelled. It is often thought that Diodotus' view is closest to that of Thucydides' himself.[344] In the debate, Diodotus attempts to convince the Athenians to do something for the Mytileneans that they will not do for the Melians: spare the innocent. He does so by making a case for *eros* as the causal and, hence, mitigating factor that should excuse their rebellion. Diodotus justifies a lenient policy towards the Mytileneans by linking *eros* to self-interest—the Mytileneans rebelled under the influence of a desire for freedom. Diodotus claims that the combination of *eros* and hope (*elpis*) always drive humans to action—

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struck them as tyrannical in its excessiveness." Plutarch *Alcibiades* 16.2 in Plutarch, *Greek Lives : A Selection of Nine Greek Lives*: 234.

[343] Plutarch *Alcibiades* 16.4-5 in ibid., 235.

[344] Cornford is perhaps the best representative of this viewpoint. Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus*: 121-26, 35.

independent of any constraints by laws or other fears (3.45). As cities have greater objects of desire than individuals—namely freedom and control—they are even more subject to its spell. E*ros* is a temptress that leads men to their undoing and is responsible for creating an inevitable conflict between the strong and the weak that under the best of circumstances can be managed, but never eradicated. The Diodotean understanding of *eros*, then, is similar to Nicias'. In warning the Athenians against the Sicilian Expedition, Nicias describes *eros* as a sickness of "yearning for what is not here" (6.13).

While Thucydides reserves his use of *eros* primarily for Athenians, this does not mean that their Spartan combatants are any more just. Indeed, the limitations of Spartan justice are apparent for all who care to look. Again, Thucydides interleaves the examples of Plataea and Mytilene to make precisely this point. Diodotus is, in fact, able to persuade the Athenian Assembly to spare the innocent among the Mytileneans who surrendered to Athens. There will be no one capable of similarly persuading the Spartans at Plataea. After a long siege, the Plataeans surrender to the Spartans. In determining what punishment to administer, the Spartans apply a simple test for justice: whether the Spartans "had received any good service from the Plataeans in the war" (3.68).[345] The Spartans apply this test even though Plataea was an *Athenian* ally, rather than—as in the case of Mytilene—a rebellious Spartan one. Of course, the Plataeans fail this test and the Spartans slaughter the men and enslave the women and children. A more self-interested understanding of justice is difficult to imagine and reflects a typical Spartan brutality when dealing with other *poleis*—but a brutality that, nevertheless, is inextricably linked to a zealous protection and love of her own *polis*. This very love highlights Thucydides' questioning of the grounds of Sparta's famous moderation. Moderation in its traditional

[345] Woodruff translation.

sense, that is, willful self-restraint when other avenues are available, initially seems to be a Spartan accomplishment (especially if Diodotus is right about human beings' propensity to erotic recklessness). Thucydides recognizes this in Book VIII, when he praises the Spartans and Chians as the only two peoples who have been both prosperous and moderate (8.24). However, he almost immediately points out that these two cities had the greatest number of slaves (8.40). Thucydides takes pains to show how brutal Sparta is when dealing with the Helot slaves that make the Spartan regime possible. Sparta's moderation turns out to be a result of her need to control the Helots, rather than true virtue. Like Athens, it seems that Sparta also uses her power to dominate the weak. The difference is that Sparta's "empire" is internal.

In the Mytilenean Debate, Thucydides draws our attention to the similarity between Athenian imperialism and Spartan "moderation." Cleon, the "most violent" man in Athens and Pericles' successor, argues (*contra* Diodotus), that all the Mytilenean men of military age be put to death, whether or not they participated in the rebellion, and the rest of the population enslaved. In other words, Cleon argues for precisely the same action taken by the Spartans at Plataea. As with the Spartans at Plataea, Cleon defines justice exclusively with respect to Athenian interests, and even begins his speech by recognizing that the "empire is a tyranny" (3.37). Like a Spartan thinking about his treatment of the Helots, Cleon believes the consequence of Athenian tyranny is that any misstep might mean her undoing. The tenuousness of their condition requires cutting off debate and moving to swift action—even if that means ignoring considerations of justice in favor of what is most expedient for Athens. The moderation of Sparta (and Cleon), then, is revealed to be an illusion—a result of pressure and fear rather than virtue.

The dissolution of social norms Thucydides describes during the Corcyrean *stasis* and the plague at Athens are a consequence of specific desires woven into the fabric of

politics and human nature that get amplified during times of crisis. According to Diodotus, these desires are primarily a function of *eros*. *Stasis* and plague are merely crucibles within the ever-present human yearning for what one does not have, and in our inescapable mortality. Thought of in this way, Thucydides suggests that *stasis* and plague—though fortunately rare—are not as different from ordinary life as we might initially suspect. Therefore, any hopes for the greatness possible in civil society depends on circumscribing *eros* and its effects. Recall that Thucydides identifies the transvaluing of *euetheia* or simplicity as the beginning of the moral degeneration on Corcyra (3.83). The corollary of this is that *euetheia* is the foundation of moral health. For Thucydides, a healthy civil society requires the generosity of spirit engendered by a kind of guileless trust and a commitment to be trustworthy to others. As he shows in the Archeology, its rise in Greece depended on a slow path toward material comfort and physical security. Without these, *euetheia* cannot endure, and the greatness inherent in civil society fades into history.

Thucydides, then, appears to understand Athenian imperialism as a consequence of a politically unshackled human nature or *eros* that leads both to Athens' power and greatness as well as to her eventual defeat. The presentation of his narrative suggests that this kind of imperialism is difficult—perhaps even impossible—to be susceptible to moderation's charm, because it sees moderation as utterly charmless. While I cannot prove it, I agree with many commentators that Diodotus' analysis seems largely to reflect Thucydides' own. And it is sobering. The Athenians vote to spare the lives of many Mytileneans—in what is perhaps the *History's* most remarkable episode—through Diodotus' subtle twisting of the classic Athenian argument to support their imperialism. As we have seen, the Athenians typically claim that all cities with sufficient power are compelled to dominate others out of fear, honor, or profit. Diodotus sets the Athenian

account inside an even larger understanding of human motivation—governed by hope and *eros*. Hope and *eros* can be said to drive not only the Mytilenean desire for freedom, but also the drive or *ethos* of Athenian imperialism. Thus, in Diodotus' view, both the weak (Mytilene) and the strong (Athens) are governed by the irrational compulsion of hope and *eros*. And though Diodotus successfully nudges Athenian imperial policy (the Athenians only execute the revolutionaries)—his success is short lived. At Plataea, the putatively just Spartans show just how uncommon it is for reason and moderation to rule the day. And this rareness echoes throughout the increasingly fevered behavior of the Athenians as the war progresses.[346] There is no Diodotus on Melos.

Thucydides subtly reveals that there is less difference between Athens and Sparta than initially appears. In a similar manner, we are able to see the congruence between Plato and Thucydides' teachings on Athenian imperialism. As we've seen, there is more than simply probable cause to believe that Plato was familiar with Thucydides' *History*. I believe that the textual and thematic references in the *Gorgias*, *Menexenus*, *Protagoras*, and *Republic* are simply too numerous and explicit to leave much doubt. Plato's textual allusions to Thucydides serve to underscore the practical implications of many of his philosophical positions as well as highlight the common ground between the two thinkers. Both Plato and Thucydides understand the problem of imperialism as the overcoming of moderation by *pleonexia* unleashed and reinforced by the political implications of sophistic teachings that valorize the life of appetite and power. And both Plato and Thucydides rely on moderation to control *pleonexia*. I believe that the difference between the two thinkers is best understood as a difference in means to similar ends. Their difference is not simply, as many commentators remark, one of an optimistic

[346] This is not to say that Thucydides ever suggests that the Athenians are moderate. Indeed, they announce their worldview in their speech at Sparta.

Plato versus a pessimistic Thucydides. Indeed, as we've seen, both thinkers show precisely how unlikely it is for the moderation and respect required to support justice to come into being (though both show the possibility). Plato and Thucydides join in lamenting the chasm between true virtue, of which justice is a part, and the expressed virtue and justice of the Athenian empire. Rather, Plato's moderation results from education and participation in a regime that combines politics and philosophy to direct *eros*, whereas Thucydides' moderation relies exclusively through stifling or displacing *eros*.

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